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# REVIEW FROM THE PRESIDENT



TIM LAMBERT

Abraham Lincoln once famously said,

"The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next."

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

The 16th president of the United States of America recognized a vital point: What we teach our children is important. Education lays the groundwork for the future generation's values, political beliefs, and worldviews.

In recent decades we've seen a widespread departure from the truths of God's Word throughout our culture. In many ways the United States has become a post-Christian culture, where biblical teachings are rejected, scorned, or even forbidden.

This departure from Christian values is especially evident in our public schools.

The philosophies taught in today's schoolrooms are often a far cry from the wholesome lessons that the younger generations so desperately need.

For thousands of Christian families, home schooling provides a welcome alternative to the secularism permeating our public school system. Many parents recognize the timeless wisdom behind Solomon's famous words: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

As home schooling becomes increasingly popular, not just in Texas but around the country, we are seeing a direct fulfillment of Abraham Lincoln's aforementioned statement. It's true that education directly influences government, and I'm convinced that the phenomenal growth of home schooling is beginning to make a tangible difference in many political and legislative circles.

Consider two of THSC's latest political initiatives: The THSC Watchmen and the THSC Rangers. Each of these programs recruits home school students and home school graduates who are passionate about the Texas political arena. They allow aspiring young men and women to actively raise public awareness of home schooling, lobby for parental rights legislation, and campaign for conservative candidates who support family values.

Already, the Watchmen and Rangers have proven themselves to be formidable political forces in Austin and around the state. For example, in last year's election cycles, the THSC Rangers campaigned for numerous THSC-endorsed candidates, and 75% of those candidates won their elections!

With the 2015 Texas Legislative Session now underway, the THSC Watchmen are hard at work researching, writing, and amending legislation that promotes home schooling and parental rights. THSC has ambitious plans for this year's legislative session, and I encourage you to visit our website for regular updates on the latest developments.

Truly, it is exciting to see the many ways Texas home schoolers are "carrying the torch" and promoting virtuous standards.

In many ways, these students and graduates are a refreshing exception from the secularism common in younger generations. I look forward to witnessing the great things God has in store for home schoolers as they make a positive difference in our state and country.

At the same time, we recognize that challenges remain. Opposition to home schooling persists. As the president of THSC, I regularly hear from families across the state who face disenfranchisement or discrimination because of their home education.

Even in the past few months, numerous families contacted THSC to seek help or counsel. For example, some home school students were recently denied Texas driver licenses because they did not have official school records. Another home school student lost Social Security benefits because the student was not attending a standard school.

In one case of marital separation, a parent threatened to remove child support simply because a daughter was home schooled.

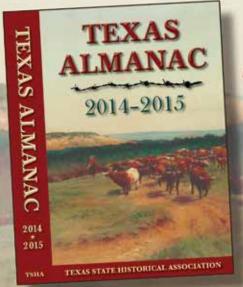
Meanwhile, in Dallas, the Tutt family continues to fight state officials as they seek to regain custody of all their children. On November 21, 2013, armed government officials unlawfully removed the

family's children, and—despite numerous court hearings and legal actions—several of the children have not yet been returned home. To make matters worse, the Tutt family home was damaged in a large fire late last year after a squirrel chewed through wiring in the family's garage. As I have written in previous columns, this ongoing violation of Mr. and Mrs. Tutts' parental rights is deplorable, and THSC will stand with this dear family until justice is served.

Clearly, many home school families across the state still face varying degrees of opposition from government officials and family members alike. Now, more than ever, there is a great need for home schoolers to stand strong and not be intimidated by the resistance. Even in the face of difficulties, we should always remember that as Abraham Lincoln realized, our calling to educate our children is an immensely important one. Thank you for allowing THSC to defend parents' educational freedoms as we fulfill our mission of Keeping Texas Families Free.



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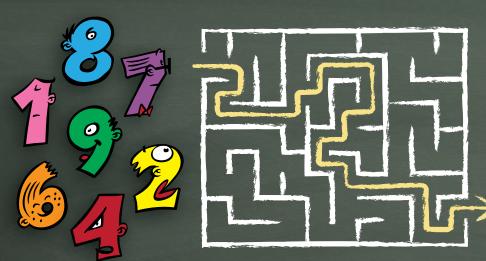












# Finding the Best Math Curriculum — for You

by Lynne Tagawa

ath is math, right? Well, parents sometimes discover that what works well for one child doesn't seem to work well for another. Or maybe they hear someone else praise a certain curriculum and wonder, "Am I shortchanging my child?"

Before looking at individual curricula, let's discuss the reasons why they are different. Interestingly, there are different philosophies and/ or methodologies behind each shiny book you examine. Many are designed for the traditional classroom; some are designed with home schoolers in mind. Some classroom curricula have "home school" versions, but the textbook is the same. Both types may come with extra helps, videos, or even online classes.

Philosophically, some are "traditional," meaning that memorization is emphasized, even in the upper grades. Some are "incremental," meaning that old skills are continually reviewed while new ones are slowly introduced. A few are "classical," in which learning starts with the concrete and progresses to an active discovery of the logic behind the math.

A Beka (Pre-K-12th) is an example of a traditional curriculum designed for the classroom. Its emphasis on drill and memory work can be useful at the elementary level, but the algebra and geometry books are difficult to use. Recommendation: If you do use these secondary books, use them as a source for problems to solve. Don't ask your son or daughter to memorize the steps. Instead, help them to discover the procedures.

Saxon (K-Calculus) is an example of an incremental curriculum designed for the classroom. Example and practice are stressed over memorization. Occasionally, however, there is not enough practice for a new concept to become established in the student's mind. Recommendation: Keep tabs on the types of problems on which your son or daughter makes mistakes, and give him or her more practice in these areas. (Hint: For the SAT, mastering the first half of a geometry text is enough.) Manipulatives are included in the early grades.

Teaching Textbooks (3rd-Precalculus) is an incremental curriculum designed for home schoolers, similar to Saxon but with user-friendly text. It comes with DVDs that not only teach the lessons but also work out every single problem in the book for the student. Textbooks can also be purchased without the DVDs. This is a good basic program.

Math-U-See (K-Precalculus) is an incremental curriculum also designed for home schoolers. It has two features that make it especially beloved by parents.

First, it makes extensive use of manipulatives in the early grades, which is a real boon to understanding number theory, not to mention making arithmetic more accessible to those with learning disabilities or delays. Second, it is flexible. The amount of practice needed to learn a concept is up to you: one worksheet or two? Then the student proceeds to the review section of the lesson. Like Teaching Textbooks, Math-U-See includes lessons on DVDs, but textbooks can be purchased without them.

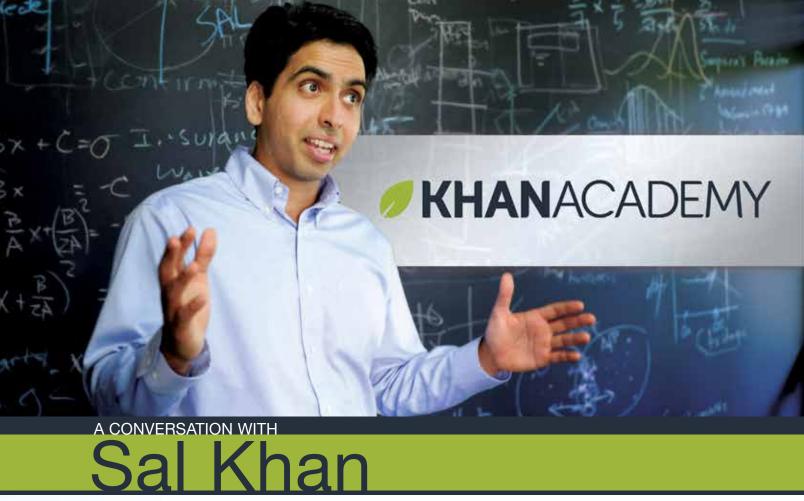
Singapore Math (K-12th) is the new kid on the block. It is designed for the classroom but has received rave reviews from some home schoolers. This is a curriculum I would classify as "classical": It progresses from concrete to visual to abstract in a challenging way. If your son or daughter successfully completes this series of textbooks, he or she will have an awesome understanding of math. There are some significant caveats, however. If you switch curricula midstream, you will need the placement test to do so. Don't be surprised if your math whiz has to repeat a grade. He isn't actually behind, because Singapore is that much more advanced. A final note: There are two types of books designed for use in the United States. I would recommend the "standardized" version.

These and other math curricula are constantly being updated with new features, such as software for grading, so check their websites for the latest—and for prices.

Is your son or daughter struggling with math? Are you tempted to switch curricula? Ask yourself: Is my child struggling because he is being challenged, or struggling because he can't understand? Sometimes a struggle is helped by taking breaks or even by a cup of hot chocolate.

If that doesn't work, pray about switching.

Lynne Tagawa is a wife and mother of four sons. The author of Sam Houston's Republic, she is a secondary science teacher with experience in private schools and in homeschooling her own sons. Presently she tutors and teaches homeschool co-op classes.



#### WHAT IS KHAN ACADEMY, AND WHEN WAS IT LAUNCHED?

Khan Academy began in 2004 when I started tutoring my cousins in math. I wrote some software to give them practice problems, feedback, and assessment--really, a way for them to learn at their own pace and for me as their tutor to see how they were progressing. I needed to give the software a home, and since the domain name KhanAcademy.org was available, I named my site Khan Academy.

In 2006 I started filming video lessons to complement the exercise software. Then I posted them on YouTube, and they took on a life of their own! Khan Academy is often associated with this collection of videos, but it didn't start with videos. Our mission has always been a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere. And, in my mind, videos can be part of a world-class education, but they aren't everything. You also need practice, feedback, assessment, and community.

One way we're achieving this goal is the mission experience. Students can pick, say, our Algebra I mission, and we'll start giving them practice problems. Based on how the student performs on those problems-and there's really an inexhaustible supply--our system starts to understand what the student knows and doesn't know. Then it starts recommending skills for the student to work on, really just trying to emulate what a good tutor can do. For help on these problems, students can access hints, articles, and videos. Students can see how they're doing and choose to share this information with parents, teachers, and tutors--people we call "coaches." Coaches can celebrate

students' progress and encourage them to keep learning. Additionally, if a student is struggling with a concept on Khan Academy, their coach can see that and help them with that skill.

Aside from our math missions, the other big thing we've invested in is a computer programming platform. Like many others, I feel very strongly that computer science is the next "R" (even though it starts with a C)-just as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. On Khan Academy, students can learn to program in JavaScript in a very visual way. They can share what they've created in a portfolio, get feedback from other members of the Khan Academy community, and show their work to their friends. So that's another big piece of what we're doing--allowing students to build their own computer programming portfolios.

#### HOW DID IT GET STARTED, AND WHY?

In 2004 I was living in Boston. My cousin Nadia was in seventh grade in New Orleans and struggling with math. She'd always gotten A's and B's before, but there were significant gaps in her knowledge, which were keeping her from moving forward and taking the more advanced math track. I wanted to help, so I started tutoring her via telephone and Yahoo Doodle after work.

Word about this free tutoring spread around the family, and soon I was tutoring a handful of relatives. Scheduling quickly became a challenge, so I started building the exercise software and recording the video lessons to address that. My cousins liked the videos so much they gave me a

backhanded compliment: They said they liked me better on YouTube than in person! Soon it became clear that people outside my family were watching the videos as well--including many home schoolers. It dawned on me that there was a big opportunity here to scale what I was doing and help people all over the world who wanted to learn.

Khan Academy was incorporated as a nonprofit in 2008, and the following year I quit my hedge fund job to focus on Khan Academy full-time. In 2010 we finally received the level of philanthropic support we needed to get office space and hire a team to work on the mission.

If you fast-forward to today, most of what we're investing in is adaptive software that allows learners of any age to practice math skills at their own pace, receive feedback to understand their strengths and weaknesses, move up their learning curve as quickly as possible, and see evidence that they've actually learned the material.

#### WHAT MAKES KHAN ACADEMY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER ONLINE LEARNING OPTIONS?

The idea of giving students software that adapts to them and helps them learn at their own pace is a very old one. People have been working on this for 30 or 40 years and talking about it since computers came out!

So you won't see ads on Khan Academy. You won't be asked to subscribe with a monthly fee. And you can rest assured that the folks building Khan Academy eat, sleep, and breathe one question: "How do we make Khan Academy better for your child?" and not, "How can we get more revenue from you?"

YOU WROTE AN EDITORIAL TITLED "WHY I'LL NEVER TELL MY SON HE'S SMART" ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FOSTERING A GROWTH MINDSET.

#### WHAT IS "GROWTH MINDSET", AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In a nutshell, growth mindset is the belief that you can develop your own abilities--that your intelligence is not fixed. Research shows that your brain is like a muscle. The more you use it, the more it grows.

As a young person, I realized that if I allowed myself to struggle with something long enough, it would click and all make sense. Although I didn't know it at the time, I was benefiting from a growth mindset. Years later, when I started building Khan Academy, I tried to imagine what I would have wanted when I was younger. So implicitly, Khan Academy was designed as a tool for applying a growth mindset.

As Khan Academy grew and I became more familiar with growth

You only have to know one thing:

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I think what's interesting about Khan Academy is our approach. We believe that if students really understand the underlying ideas, then everything else follows from that. So our videos and exercises are very rigorous, but they're never about memorizing formulas. They're about understanding the underlying concepts that allow you to derive the formulas. And from the beginning, the videos and software have been very approachable, very human, and very intuitive. I think a lot of students appreciate that.

Another thing that differentiates us is our team. The old entrepreneurial wisdom is to hire people smarter than yourself, and I've done that in spades. We've been able to attract some of the best thinkers in the world--in education, programming, and learning analytics--to make a learning resource that I think is the best thing out there. And part of the reason we've been able to attract them is our not-for-profit mission focus. I don't think there is such a thing as a double bottom line business. Our bottom line is a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere. And the fact that we have this mission, that we've already had a big impact, and that we're already at scale allows us to attract a lot of great talent and supporters and to create this public good in a very unfettered way.

mindset research, I realized there was a natural synergy between Khan Academy as a tool and growth mindset as an idea. We wanted to help students develop a growth mindset as they worked on our site, so we started collaborating with Carol Dweck, who coined the term "growth mindset" and is the leading researcher in the field. With her and her group at Stanford, we've created growth mindset interventions on Khan Academy, and from this initial research, we've seen very positive results.

Now, our goal is twofold.

First, to continue building a site that is one of the best places to apply a growth mindset, if not the best.

Second, to improve Khan Academy explicitly as a mindset-building tool, one that motivates students to foster a growth mindset and understand its benefits.

Take control of your learning by working on the skills you choose at your own pace.



#### **Home School Specifics**

WE UNDERSTAND THAT HOME SCHOOLERS WERE SOME OF THE EARLIEST USERS/ ADOPTERS OF KHAN ACADEMY. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT WAS TRUE?

In a lot of ways, I was acting as a home school teacher for my cousins when I started Khan Academy. I wasn't just helping them on their homework; I was teaching them things they hadn't been exposed to in class yet. So it's not surprising that other people doing similar things-like home schooling-would find these tools valuable.

Also, a home schooling environment offers more flexibility than a traditional school. Home school parents can allow their children to progress at their own pace, go back to remediate any gaps in their knowledge, and take more agency over their own learning. These principles are core to Khan Academy's philosophy, and I think they're core to a lot of home schoolers as well. So it's no surprise that home school families were among our first adopters.

## HOW MANY USERS DOES KHAN ACADEMY CURRENTLY HAVE, AND ABOUT WHAT PERCENTAGE ARE CONNECTED WITH HOME SCHOOLING?

In an average month, 12 million people use Khan Academy. Since we don't ask users whether they're home schooling when they sign up on Khan Academy, we don't know the exact number of home schoolers using our site. Anecdotally, however, we know that there's a significant community of home school families on Khan Academy. For example, in spring 2014 we surveyed a group of our most highly engaged users, and many of them told us that they use Khan Academy in a home school setting.

The Khan Academy home page has a button for parents and a button for teachers.

#### WHAT IS THE RIGHT OPTION FOR A HOME SCHOOL PARENT TO GET STARTED?

The core difference between these options is that the teacher interface helps you manage a larger cohort of students, while the parent interface is designed for users with just a handful of students. So if you're a parent home schooling your own children--say two, three, four, or five kids-the parent interface makes a lot more sense. If your home school is scaled up--say you're part of a co-op where one parent teaches students from several families--you might choose the teacher interface. That way, you can see progress reports for 30 students at a time.

No matter which option you choose, you'll be able to see the same progress information for your students. The difference is in just how this information is displayed.

## WOULD YOU DISCUSS BADGES AND THE MASTERY SYSTEM AND HOW THESE INCENTIVES COULD BE OF PARTICULAR HELP TO HOME SCHOOL FAMILIES?

The one industry that's really figured out how to motivate young people is the video game industry. Although this can be frustrating for parents who don't want their kids playing video games all the time, at Khan Academy we've always believed that a lot of these learnings could be very interesting if we tied them to productive activities. So we've invested a lot of time and energy asking ourselves, "What are the best practices from the video game world that we can use to engage and motivate students, whether they want to learn math or physics or something else?" The game mechanics on our site--energy points, avatars, and badges--help to achieve this goal.

The mastery system ties in to our game mechanics, but it's fundamentally pedagogical. In a traditional school, you study a unit, take a test on it, and move on. Even if you do well on the test, you might forget the material afterward. So later, when you take a standardized test or a final exam, you've forgotten half the material.

We think it's really important for students to keep seeing things they've already been exposed to.

So in our mastery system, doing the practice problems will get you only to the first level: "practiced."

To get to higher levels of mastery, you have to do problems in a mixed-context environment. You'll see the same skill, but it will be days, weeks, or even months after you first practiced it. The goal is to make sure that you've really retained the skill and can connect it with other concepts. We also want to ensure that you can recognize when you need to apply the skill, rather than just knowing that every problem on the test or quiz will be in the same format.

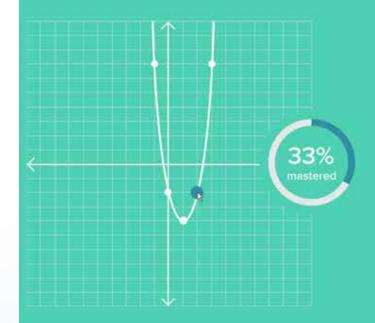
So, in short, the game mechanics are designed to motivate students to keep reviewing and retaining concepts they've learned in the past.

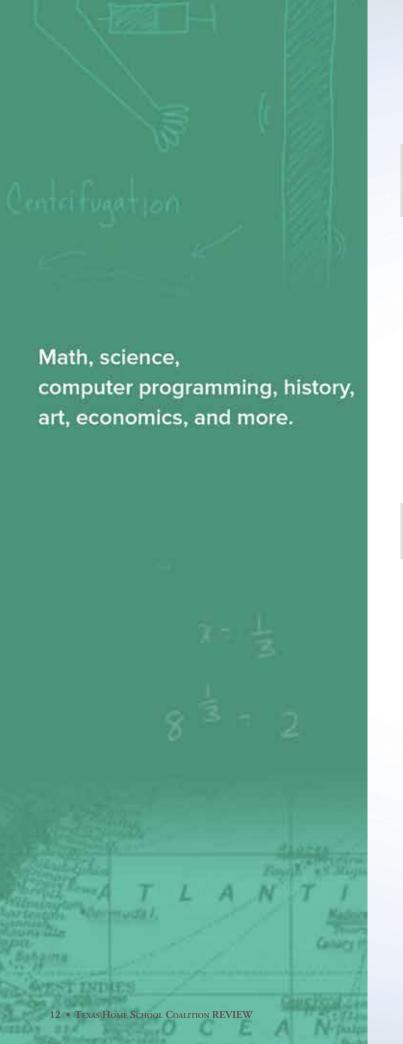
HOME SCHOOL FAMILIES ARE ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR A GOOD DEAL. FREE IS ABOUT AS GOOD AS IT GETS.

#### HOW IS KHAN ACADEMY FUNDED THAT MAKES THIS POSSIBLE?

We're funded through donations. We have donations as small as five dollars from kids and parents who've found our resources helpful. At the opposite extreme, we've received grants from large education foundations, who have been looking for years for ways to empower large numbers of students and have found that Khan Academy is unique in its ability to scale and to reach kids and parents directly. So it's everything from large grants to five-dollar donations, and it all helps.

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#### Test Prep & Common Core

WE NOTICED SAT TEST PREPARATION MATERIALS.

DOES KHAN ACADEMY HAVE A
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COLLEGE BOARD,
AND ARE THE MATERIALS CURRENT WITH THE
FORMAT AND CONTENT OF THE NEW SAT?

Yes, we have a significant relationship with the College Board. In March 2014 the College Board announced it was developing a new SAT for 2016 and working to address the historical inequities around test prep. The College Board decided to exclusively partner with Khan Academy as the official preparation resource for the new SAT. And when we say preparation, we mean something much deeper than what a lot of people associate with traditional test prep. To us, preparation is about actually learning the material. It's about engaging with the content starting in elementary school and middle school so that by the time you get to the SAT, you're ready for it. We're working closely with the College Board to design our free SAT preparation materials and to make sure that the practice students get on Khan Academy is indicative of what they will see on the new SAT.

YOUR WEBSITE INCLUDES COVERAGE OF THE COMMON CORE.

## AS A MATHEMATICIAN AND EDUCATOR, WILL YOU SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THESE STANDARDS?

When I first found out about the Common Core, I was intrigued, but I was also skeptical. With 50 states having 50 different sets of standards, making sure that Khan Academy covered all the standards was a grueling task. So I could see how the Common Core would make it easier for us to meet the needs of students all over the country. On the other hand, I'd seen standard-setting processes in the past. I realized that you can change the standards, but if you're not changing a lot of the other variables, you aren't going to improve anything.

My general view is that these standards are better than what's happening in most of the states. They are more rigorous and more focused on conceptual understanding. That said, I think it's still an open question whether the Common Core will be able to do all that is promised. Because it's more rigorous, you will see more frustration with it among students and teachers, and you will see test scores on Common Core assessments go down relative to previous tests.

At the end of the day, though, what really matters is whether you understand math. If you get math, you'll do just fine, whether you're in Singapore, Finland, California, or Texas. And if you don't get math, you will struggle with any set of standards. So the whole point of Khan Academy is that regardless of where you are--and a third of our users are outside of the U.S.--you are learning math on a very deep level, and you can advance as far as BC calculus.

#### Future of Khan Academy

YOU'VE BEEN STEADILY ADDING CONTENT AND SUBJECT MATTER.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE NEWER RESOURCES THAT PEOPLE MIGHT NOT BE AWARE OF JUST YET?

A big one is our computer science platform. Students work at their own pace, create programs, and learn programming techniques and ideas at a fairly deep level so that they're ready to start making their own applications and games. We also have a college admissions portal with information about navigating financial aid and getting into college. We have a lot of content on financial literacy--including finance and accounting--as well as a whole section on health and medicine and materials from NASA. A lot of people think that Khan Academy is very left brained, but there's actually a huge right-brained aspect to what we're doing. Our art history materials are a perfect example. We've partnered with some of the world's most prominent museums, including the Getty, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Smithsonian. And I've just scratched the surface!

#### WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE OVER THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO?

A ton of new things are happening in the next year. In January, we launched a new iPad app. Our previous iPad app gave users access to all our videos, but it didn't capture our adaptive software. The new app provides a much richer learning experience--including handwriting recognition. Students can work out problems on the app and receive personalized recommendations for what to practice next. As use of mobile devices grows, Khan Academy will become more and more of a mobile organization, so we're very excited about this app.

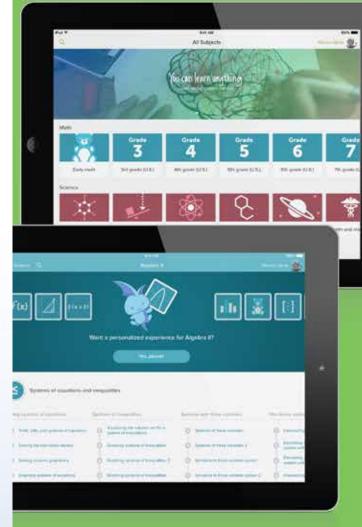
In spring 2015 we're launching a new resource to help students prepare for the 2016 SAT. As I mentioned before, this resource will be a very deep and interactive platform. Students will be able to see what they know and don't know and get unlimited practice so that they can improve their knowledge, do better on the SAT, and be more college ready.

We're also going to expand the scope of the subjects we cover beyond just math. We already have videos on history, art, physics, and chemistry, but we're going to start having missions and exercises for some of these subjects.

## WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT KHAN ACADEMY AND RESOURCES FOR USING KHAN ACADEMY AS PART OF HOME SCHOOLING?

A great place to begin is khanacademy.org/homeschool, which summarizes the resources we offer home school families. For stories from families using Khan Academy in home school and ideas on how to get started, check out our coach resources, located at khanacademy.org/coach-res.

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Volunteering for THSC is an outstanding way to give of your time to serve the home school community of Texas. THSC is a non-profit organization, and your time and assistance is greatly valued.

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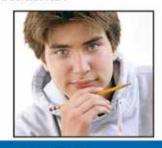
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- **b.** James Buchanan
- **c.** James Madison
- d. James Garfield
- e. Millard Fillmore
- **f.** Rutherford B. Hayes
- g. Theodore Roosevelt
- h. Thomas Jefferson
- i. Ulysses S. Grant
- j. Zachary Taylor

## To celebrate Presidents Day in February, test your Presidential knowledge.

#### Which President:

- 1. Was issued a speeding ticket for \$20 for riding his horse too fast down a Washington street?
- Could write in Latin with one hand, while writing in Greek with the other hand at the same time?
- 3. Was an avid inventor who is credited with inventing the coat hanger, hideaway bed, and dumbwaiter?
- 4. Pastured his old Army horse, Whitey, on the White House lawn and visitors would take horse hairs as souvenirs?
- 5. Lost the sight in one eye while boxing in the White House?
- 6. Stood 5'4" and barely weighed 100 pounds?
- 7. Couldn't read Latin and refused an honorary degree from Oxford University, saying a person shouldn't accept a degree he couldn't read?
- 8. Had one nearsighted eye and the other farsighted. As a result he always cocked his head to the left?
- 9. Conducted the first Easter egg roll at the White House?
- 10. An excellent extemporaneous speaker, he once made 140 completely different speeches in 30 days?



### I AM APOLOGIA SCIENCE

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#### Virginia Stilwell

College graduate, Bachelor of Science Degree in Equine Science and Management









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hat could "the history lady" possibly have to say about this month's theme, Teaching Math and Science? A great deal, considering that I'm a huge proponent of interdisciplinary study—integrating subjects by means of unit studies or other discovery learning techniques. Integrating knowledge is an excellent way to boost students into upper-level thinking.

#### What do I mean by "upper-level thinking"?

Any learning process consists of progressive steps. At the entry level of mathematics, for example, young children memorize the numbers and their values before they begin to understand the concepts of addition and subtraction and learn to apply those skills to solve equations. This is the beginning of knowledge. As students mature and learn to reason independently, we challenge them to analyze and evaluate what they've learned and eventually to synthesize their knowledge to create new ideas. Upper-level thinking skills are what make knowledge useful. When students begin to think at the upper levels, they stop asking, "Why do I need to know this?" and begin to understand how one area of knowledge relates to all the others.

#### How do you help children integrate knowledge?

I'm sure you've heard the joke about how many home schoolers it takes to change a light bulb. First we take out the old light bulb and study it, noting the broken filament. Then we learn who invented the light bulb and what the filament is made of, and we theorize why the filament is twisted and why the glass bulb is sealed. We look up the definition of watts, amps, and lumens and write a paper about Thomas Edison. (No need to make a salt map locating the city of Edison's first factory, but older students may wish to research Nikola Tesla and write an essay comparing alternating and direct current.) At the store we compare the price of light bulbs, dividing total cost by number of bulbs and average burning hours, to see which gives the most efficiency for the least price. When we pay we use rounding to estimate the cost with tax and see who can make correct change for \$5 without peeking at the cash register. And do you remember whose face is on a \$5 bill? In short, a home school family of any size can change a light bulb, but it's going to take ALL DAY!

Funny? Yes. True? Maybe. Example of integrated knowledge? Definitely!

Specific suggestions for integrating math and science into your study of history:

Subtract birth dates from the year an event occurred to find out the age of historical figures. For example, some revisionists hint that Christopher Columbus was an inept sailor, since he left Spain dangerously

late in the season and miscalculated his route. But Columbus was born in 1451 and sailed in 1492, making him 38 or 39 when he set sail. Since his writings tell us he went to sea at the age of 10, we can assume that he was not inexperienced.

Create a timeline—an historical number line of sorts—to synthesize dates and events. Consider, for example, that the Moors (Muslims) conquered Cordoba, Spain, in AD 711. The Crusades, which took place between AD 1095 and 1291, can then be seen as a retaliatory defense rather than unwarranted aggression from Europe. Spain did not regain control of its territory until the Reconquista of 1492. (Remember the war that tied up Queen Isabella's ships, causing Columbus to leave late in the season, which in turn caused him to be blown off course, which led to his discovery of the New World?) Timelines create all sorts of mathematical opportunities and generate a much fuller picture of history as well.

Study the scientific discoveries of the era. Again considering Columbus, students might enjoy learning about navigational devices such as the astrolabe—an instrument so simple that you can build one at home using a paper plate, a drinking straw, and a washer on a string (cse.ssl.berkeley.edu/AtHomeAstronomy/activity\_07.html). With this simple device, men crossed oceans! It is also interesting to note that the most important technological advancement of the millennium, Gutenberg's printing press, was invented in 1450, enabling news of the discovery of a New World to be broadcast widely. When Martin Luther published his "95 Theses" in 1517 and translated the New Testament in 1522, those were easily broadcast too.

Integrating knowledge increases understanding, which fosters wisdom—and it's easy to do once you become accustomed to looking for opportunities to teach across disciplines.



Lynn Dean was a reluctant historian. Bored with schoolbooks that chronicled battle dates and dead people, she feared inflicting mind-numbing data on her own students. Fortunately, she discovered the classic appeal of storytelling—adventure sagas about real people who struggled to overcome obstacles while pursuing their dreams. For more than a decade Lynn has combined unit studies, field trips, and quality

literature to create unique and memorable experiences in discovery learning.

#### **SUMMER SCIENCE:**

#### STUDYING THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY

by Sara Matson



On a sunny morning in late May my twin daughters, Leah and Chloe, and I hike in a park near our home.

Suddenly, Chloe points at a weed growing near the path.

#### "Hey, Mom! Milkweed! Do you think there are any eggs on it?"

We carefully check each leaf for the cream-colored, pinheadsized eggs of the monarch butterfly. When we find one, we carry the leaf home, set it in a box, and wait for the egg to hatch. When it does, a familiar summer cycle begins: that of studying the stages of the monarch.

As a fourth-grade teacher 15 years ago, I received my first monarch egg from a student. When that caterpillar eventually made its chrysalis, I was so excited to see the butterfly emerge that I brought it (and the cardboard box to which it was attached) on vacation with me. When I started home schooling my own kids, I naturally shared my monarch fascination with them. This fun activity is science in action and chock-full of opportunities for summer learning.

#### Here's a brief overview of the monarch's life cycle and what we've learned from observing it:

**Egg:** Our eyes are always open for milkweed. This plant on which the butterfly lays her eggs often grows by the side of the road, but it also can be found in parks, in nature reserves, and even in people's gardens. We've learned where the best patches grow in our town, and we notice when it gets mown down by city workers or pulled up by neighbors who don't appreciate it. This observation has led to some good discussions about how land development and farming practices are threatening this plant that monarchs need to survive.

Larva: A caterpillar eats. A lot. Caring for it by providing fresh leaves and cleaning its box or cage offers opportunities for responsibility. With all that munching, the larva grows at an amazing rate, which allows us to practice measuring. We've also learned about predators. This past summer one of our caterpillars was killed by a spider that had hitched a ride inside our home on a milkweed leaf. We'll never make that mistake again!

**Pupa:** Watching a caterpillar form its chrysalis is strange and wondrous. First, using its mouth, the caterpillar spins a small circle of silk. It then hangs upside-down from this "button" for a day or so. When it's ready to transform, the caterpillar gradually wiggles its way out of its striped skin, exposing a light green body underneath. Once the skin is fully shed, this new body hardens into a lovely, seagreen, gold-flecked chrysalis. Like a comet or a solar eclipse, it's one of those special events in nature that people don't see every day. We feel blessed that we have.

Emergence: The birth of a butterfly makes us think beyond ourselves. My girls and I have had some great conversations about God while watching a newly hatched butterfly drop from its chrysalis and pump fluid into its wings. When the wings are dry we identify the butterfly's sex. (Butterflies with black pouches on their hind wings are males.) Then we carry the butterfly out into the sun and watch it fly away.

Last summer turned out to be our best butterfly summer ever—almost 15 butterflies reared and released. Then, in August, we stumbled across Monarch Watch, a program based at the University of Kansas. Among other things, this program gathers research on the monarch's fall migration to Mexico. We'd heard about the migration phenomenon before, but somehow the website inspired us to dig deeper. We read books and discovered how far some migrating butterflies travel to get to their overwintering site in Mexico (up to 3000 miles!). We watched a film about migrating monarchs and learned about threats to their overwintering sites. We also discovered that we could participate in a scientific study by tagging migrating monarchs we find!

So, come another sunny September day, our cycle comes full circle. At a nearby arboretum, Leah, Chloe, and I chase monarchs with a butterfly net. After catching one we apply a tag to one wing, record its sex, and then let it go. By the end of the afternoon we've tagged 25 butterflies.

Perhaps someday we'll find out if any of them made it to Mexico. Whether we do or not, we've found that raising and tagging butterflies is a fun, enriching, and unforgettable experience. That's

just not something you can get from a science textbook!



Sara lives with her husband and twin daughters in Minnesota. One day she and her family hope to visit the monarchs in their overwintering site in Mexico. Until then, she'll keep writing about her favorite insect!

#### If you want to raise or tag monarchs yourself, here are some helpful resources:

#### **Monarch Watch** (monarchwatch.org)

This site has everything monarch-related: information on monarch biology, rearing, and conservation, growing milkweed, butterfly gardening, and even several research projects that rely on student-scientist partnerships. It also has a store and forums where you can ask questions.

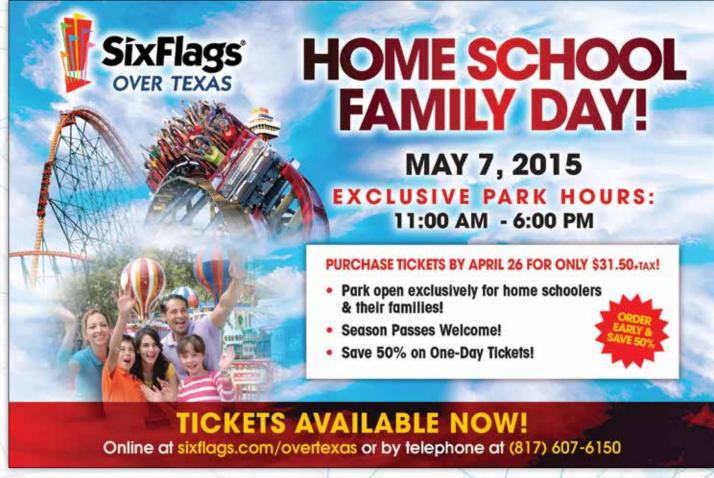
#### University of Minnesota Monarch Lab

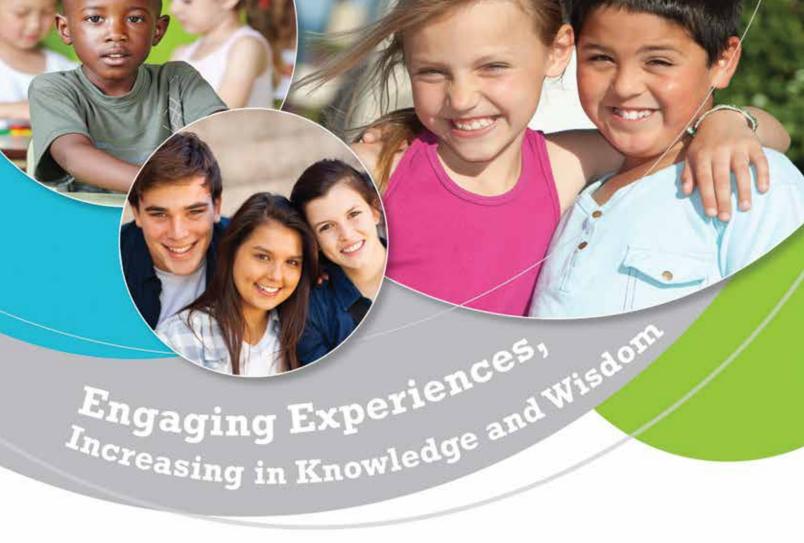
(monarchlab.umn.edu)

This site has some interesting caterpillar experiments (see Resources), information on rearing and migration, and details about how to become involved as a citizen scientist with the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project.

Journey North (learner.org/jnorth/monarch)
This site is another citizen science project site that has a

section especially for kids. Includes information on fall and spring migration, as well as a neat section on life in the butterfly sanctuary region of Mexico, complete with video clips and a mini Spanish lesson.













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## CIVE MATH A CHANCE

by Sonya E. Sherrod

ive math a chance! Yes, you heard me. It's been said that our taste buds change every five to seven years. If you harbor distasteful memories of high school algebra, when you struggled to understand math, make a conscious commitment to set that trauma aside. As they should, your children look to you as a role model. If you project fear, disdain, or consternation about math, they will too. As a nontraditional college student, I was surprised that my interest in government had grown exponentially since I was in high school. So, give math a second chance to wow you. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Trust your ability to read and understand a math textbook. As a student you may have skimmed the examples and then jumped right into working the problems in the assignment. As the teacher now, you will need to carefully read the lesson and digest the concepts to further your own understanding prior to teaching it to your student. An effective teacher will require her student to read the text as well. An ability to fully comprehend a technical textbook develops slowly, so be patient. The goal is to build your student's confidence to teach herself. If your student can successfully read and internalize a math textbook, she will be ahead of the curve in a college math course.

Be open to new approaches to working problems. The textbook may instruct your student to use strategies unfamiliar to you. Think about it: If you didn't develop a love for math, how do you think teaching your student to do math the same way you were taught will foster her love for math?

Lean heavily on definitions, principles, theorems, and identities to justify the steps of a calculation or proof. Students need you to answer the why questions, even when they don't ask them. These are building blocks used by mathematicians. Even if you are certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that your child will not choose a career in mathematics, the ability to justify steps using precepts and logic should be valued by every parent. It certainly is valued by employers.

Constructing an understanding of math can be compared to building a wall. Each brick of knowledge depends upon the bricks and mortar laid in the level below. In other words, there is no concept that can be dismissed as insignificant. For this reason, don't be embarrassed to seek assistance.

Finally, keep in mind that many, many more career opportunities will await graduates who possess a mastery of mathematics than nearly all other disciplines. The U.S. Department of Education recently reported that college graduates who earn a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) degree earn, on average, \$65,000—about \$15,000 more than non-STEM majors. The time investment in learning and teaching math will pay a hefty dividend indeed. Let this be your motivation as a parent teacher.



After homeschooling her two children, Sonya Sherrod went to college. She completed a BS and MA in mathematics and a PhD in curriculum and instruction. She currently teaches mathematics at Texas Tech University to prepare future elementary and middle school teachers. She also works with school districts as a virtual math interventionist to improve the math understanding of K-12

teachers already in the classroom.



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The average 14- to 15-year-old ornery teenage boy likes to stay up late, sleep in, argue, and do as little as possible around the house. He almost enjoys doing sub-par schoolwork. He feels obligated to let his mother know how stupid some subjects are. His favorite response is, "I dunno."

e yells statements like "You just don't understand; you'll never get it" and "You can't control me." Bathing, wearing clean clothes, and eating healthy food don't seem to cross his mind.

I confess: I have a lazy, ornery, teenage son. Apparently, so do many other moms, and many of us are wondering where we went wrong in the early years to produce such tumbleweeds. In my son's case, I strongly suspect it might be because he has a lazy, ornery mother, but I will get to that part later.

#### "My dreams are so much bigger than geometry." ~ B., 16

In truth, adolescence is one long goodbye. From the age of 12 our little boy begins his efforts to establish independence and autonomy; he breaks free from our arms and (it seems to us) wants to play in the traffic. We see him dancing on the road in a T-shirt and bare feet, and we want to run out to him with a sweater and warm socks. We despair of him ever holding a job, or getting a degree, or being a gift to his future wife, or acting like a polite, God-loving citizen. We want to fix all of his problems by moving him back into Mommy's circle of love and protection. In reality, we need to be giving him the tools for manhood, self-sufficiency, and self-discipline.

### "No, just go away; I don't need your help. I know what to do," ~ Z., 15

Mommy's little baby does not want to be mothered and smothered anymore; he wants to become a man. Moms are natural nurturers and comfort givers, but we cannot model manhood. It is precisely because we cannot give our son what he needs at this stage of development that we needs to begin to let go and let Dad.

For some moms it is especially hard to let go because we interpret this move away as rejection. This son might be our baby—the last one to grow up. We might feel our son doesn't even like us anymore or care about anything we have to say. Mom can respond in one of two ways: move closer with more control and punishment, or let him gain independence, a little at a time. The choice she makes can either bring him back full circle in later years or alienate him for many.

Over the last four years I have felt like a nagging mother, a control freak, a loser, lazy, pushy, and all the other names with which the devil loves to slam mothers when their sons pull away; however, here are some things I tried that worked.

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"Just quit talking to me about it."

#### When communicating:

Emphasize love for him that is not performance based.

Listen—really listen. Look him in the eyes when he speaks.

Ask for and embrace his opinions.

Try to see things from his perspective.

Show him how a healthy discussion works. Don't dominate, lecture, intimidate, lie, exaggerate, or manipulate.

Fight fair. Be reasonable.

Remain calm.

Give him time to process.

#### Remember: Every interaction is important.

Affirm his feelings and questions.

Be real about your own doubts and fears.

Encourage him to see hurtful interactions from other points of view. Promote role play.

#### When giving him responsibilities:

Give him responsibilities and freedoms, and gradually build them up. Decide together (you, husband, and son) what his responsibilities are, and what his consequences should be if he doesn't fulfill them. Don't choose consequences that make you suffer too. Record, sign, and date all agreements.

Incorporate his ideas into his daily schedule.

Lower your expectations to his level of ability.

Don't constantly question his judgment/choices/clothes/food/ grades/homework. Doing so shouts into his soul that you think he is incompetent or a loser or stupid.

Don't help him unless he asks you to.

#### When he is having fun alone, or during family time:

Spend fun time with him. Be active in his life.

Follow his autonomy as he needs it, but don't allow him to stay lonely for too long.

Treat him like a man.

Don't talk to others about his negative traits within his hearing. This rule includes talking about him in front of family members.

Don't save him from himself. Let natural consequences fall.

Don't respond to independence with control. Be flexible.

#### "I don't care."

#### When giving consequences for not doing his work, for disrespect, etc.:

Show a united front with your spouse.

Expect him to test his boundaries.

Follow through on consequences.

#### Possible consequences:

Let him choose his own sleep and work schedule, but if his work is not finished by Friday at 2 p.m., for example, his cell phone is taken away for the weekend.

Fine him with physical work for a bad attitude. (This consequence has the double bonus of making it easier to get along with him.) If he doesn't do his chores, you get paid to do them by selling something from his room.

#### Possible rewards/bribes:

Freedom once work is done

A drink at Starbucks, or a burger

Time in an armchair at Barnes and Noble to read manga books

A sleepover with one or two friends

A movie

A trip to a friend's house to play video games

Extra computer time

I am delighted to say that my son is finally starting to turn a corner. The biggest problem for a boy in this age group is in not knowing his destiny—not knowing where he will fit in the world. Now that our son has a vague idea of what that looks like, he is more focused on doing what it takes to get there.

As for his lazy, ornery mother, well . . .

A native Irishwoman, Sally's two home schooled children are now grown—one has started her own company providing business profiles

for companies, while the boy-man is now in training as an assistant manager at his job. There is hope!



Author of Joy in a Box and Fix Yourself in Jesus, Sally is also a lay-counselor and life coach, and she is a trainer/facilitator at a local ministry school. Find her at www.sallyhanan.com.

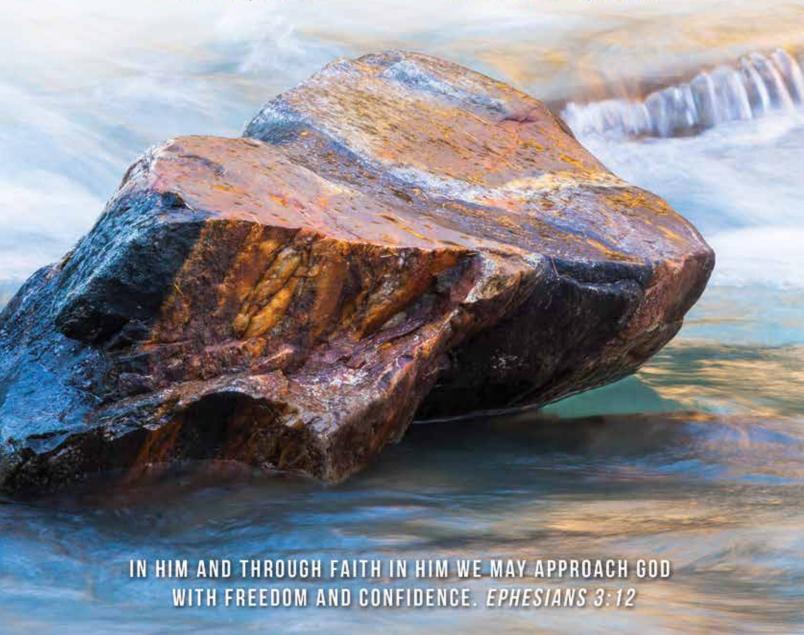


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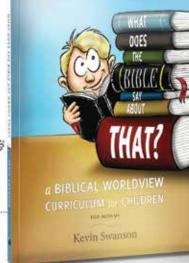
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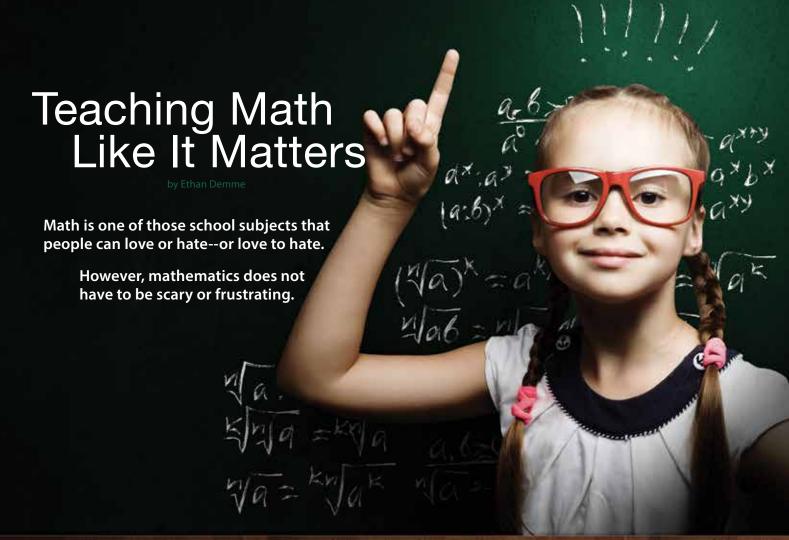
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Let's explore some helpful tips for teaching math in the "real world," address some algebra myths, and look into the benefits of learning math and how parents can help their children master mathematics.

#### **Math in Action**

When I was growing up my dad would work on my math skills by giving my brothers and me real-life math problems. On long trips in the car, he would have us calculate how fast we were going by measuring the time it took to get from one mile marker to the next. My dad would also have us calculate how much gas was left in the tank and how long it would take to arrive at our destination. These challenges entertained us, sharpened our math skills, and showed us practical applications for those skills.

Learning math that seems to lack practical application can be frustrating. How many times have people said, "How will I even use this in my everyday life?" By giving us these math challenges that sprang up naturally in a real-life context, my dad taught us that math is valuable and practical; we learned how to use math, but we also acquired implicit values that said math is something to be embraced and used, not feared or despised.

There are many ways to teach math in a real-life context. Take your children shopping and have them keep track of the total bill. Ask your kids to calculate the tip next time you go out to eat. Doing so

not only teaches percentages but also communicates the importance of tipping. Be aware of the ways that math springs up naturally in day-to-day activities, and seize the opportunities to show math in action in the real world.

#### Why We Learn Algebra

We've all heard the myths about why we need to learn algebra:

Study algebra because . . . math is inherently beautiful.

Study algebra because . . . it will help you develop critical thinking skills.

Study algebra because . . . it will be used directly on the job.

It doesn't take long to realize these myths aren't satisfying. Most students will inquire as to the purpose of learning algebra, and the vast majority of them will be given an answer that does not provide purpose and context.

Math is beautiful—said few high school students ever. Telling students they should study algebra because it's beautiful will only serve to further disillusion them with the very thing we want them to learn. Yes, math is beautiful, but that isn't why we should learn algebra.

Critical thinking skills are a basic skillset that is developed in a variety of ways, such as reading challenging books, playing an instrument, and learning logic and rhetoric. Learning algebra does have limited value in sharpening critical thinking skills, but that is hardly a good enough answer to the student's question, "Why must I learn this?"

For the final myth, let's be honest: How many people actually use algebra directly on the job? Most students who have even a vague idea of what industry they want to work in will already know if advanced algebra is required in that line of work. There are some careers that rely on algebra every day, and if a student is interested in them, focusing on algebra is a must. But for everyone else, saying, "You'll use it at work," while occasionally true, is an easily spotted myth.

#### Here are three reasons why learning algebra is important:

- **1. Speed:** People can directly use algebra to solve problems more quickly and easily than they could otherwise. For example, a simple algebraic equation can help you make a recipe smaller.
- 2. A Building Block: Algebra can serve as a foundation for learning more advanced math, like statistics and calculus, and for learning other advanced subjects, like physics and chemistry. Experts say that members of the next generation could change jobs 30-40 times throughout their careers, so students don't know if they will need some of the algebra they learn or not. Learning algebra is a life skill beneficial for upward mobility.
- **3. Evaluation:** Algebra helps us understand and critically evaluate the math done by others, such as reporters, political candidates, insurance salesmen, and bank loan officers.

People will always use the skills they have to succeed, and while they could succeed in some careers without understanding algebra, understanding algebra makes it easier to succeed. Algebra is an important life skill for doing things quicker, for being able to transition more easily from career to career, and for avoiding being taken advantage of by people who can twist the numbers in their favor. But in order to master algebra, it's crucial to learn in sequence.

#### **Sequential Learning**

Imagine if someone tried to teach a 40-year-old who has never driven before to drive by giving him the keys and telling him to drive home. Without learning basic skills like how to brake or use turn signals, he would be ill prepared to actually drive and would probably wind up crashing. Skills, not age, are what is important.

Teaching math sequentially, rather than based on age and grade, is just as important as teaching someone how to drive by showing him one step at a time. This fact is mostly understood in the very beginning of a child's education, when he is learning numbers and basic addition and subtraction, and at the end of high school when he is required to finish algebra before taking calculus. But often, in between, there is less emphasis on sequential learning. For example, mastering the order of operations is essential to mastering algebra, but many times order of operations is only dwelt on briefly and then it's on to the next topic before students have the chance to really

master the material. When students learn in sequence, mastering each concept before moving on to the next, they are able to tackle harder problems and to learn tougher concepts much more easily because they have a foundation upon which that learning can take place. When students learn out of sequence or move on to the next topic before they've mastered the current topic, it becomes much more difficult to continue learning.

All students don't learn concepts at the same pace. A student may learn one math concept in a matter of days, while another concept takes him weeks to master. One of the problems with modern education is that there is often no time for a student to work through difficult math concepts until full mastery is achieved. Sequential learning must go hand-in-hand with an individualized pace for each student.

Parents must be proactive in making sure their children are mastering math.

#### Here are three quick tips for helping children learn math in sequence and at their own pace.

- **1. Ask your kids** if they feel comfortable with the speed at which the math is being taught. Take additional time to focus on foundational concepts they struggle with in order to help them master the material.
- **2. Frequently review** previously learned math skills with your children. If your children are learning basic multiplication, review addition with them to make sure they have mastered it.
- **3. Pay attention** if your children seem continually frustrated with learning math. Frustration is often a sign that they have not mastered previous material and that it is interfering with new learning.

#### Conclusion

Math is practical, math is useful, and math is important. If parents help their children see and understand the value of math for their futures, children can then understand why they need to master their early lessons rather than just push quickly through them. Helping children see that value is a continual task and one that parents must believe themselves before they can pass it along. When that value is passed on, children will be equipped with the tools they need to succeed.

Ethan Demme is the President and CEO of Demme Learning, and is passionate about finding the best ways to build lifelong learners. You can read more about Ethan's thoughts on education at the Demme Learning blog. Ethan is an elected member of the board of supervisors in East Lampeter Township and is an active member of his local community. Ethan is a home school graduate and holds a B.A. in Communication Arts from Bryan College. Ethan has been married to his lovely wife Anna for over 7 years and they live



in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where they enjoy running, hiking, biking, swimming, canoeing, and exploring new places. Ethan's father Steve is husband to Sandra and father to Isaac, Ethan, Joseph, and John. He will be a keynote speaker at the 2015 THSC Conventions, both in Arlington (May) and The Woodlands (July), speaking about courtship and to fathers. He runs Math-U-See, a hands-on math curriculum.



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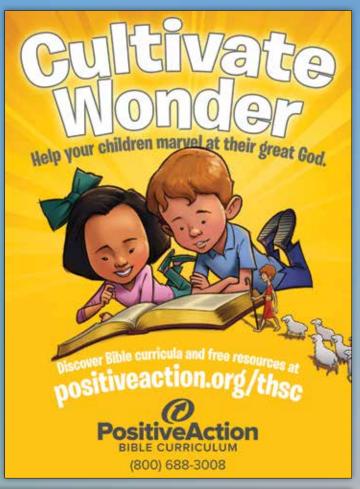
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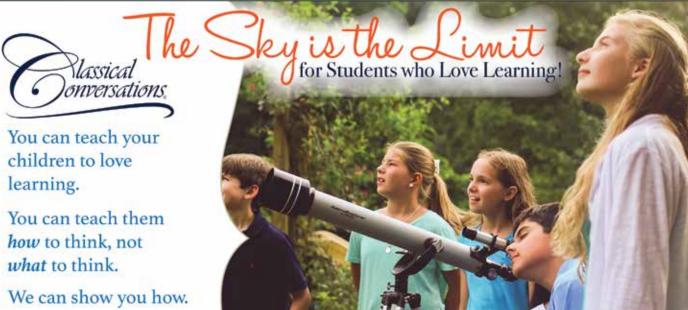


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## THSC WATCHNEN

#### **Our Mission**

The THSC Watchmen's name references Isaiah 62:6, "I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night." The THSC Watchmen research, write, and amend legislation that promotes parental rights and home schooling. They garner support from legislators and their staffs, raise public awareness, and increase home school participation in the political process.

The mission of the THSC Watchmen is to establish a presence and a level of rapport for home schoolers with the Texas Legislature that enables THSC to protect families in Texas for years to come. The THSC Watchmen continue guarding the walls to protect the rights of fit parents to direct the care, control, and upbringing of their children in our mission of *Keeping Texas Families Free*.

#### 2015 Session

For the 2015 session, THSC will champion several key issues for home schoolers and parents. The first and most critical piece of legislation will be the Texas Parental Rights Restoration Act, which closes current loopholes in chapter 153 of the Texas Family Code that allow for vindictive in-laws to take possession of a parent's child over that parent's objection—and without the provision of evidence against him that he is unfit.

Additionally, THSC will reintroduce the Tim Tebow Bill, a law already passed by more than half of the states in this country that allows home school students to compete in public school extracurricular activities in the school district in which they live and pay taxes.

On top of these key pieces of legislation, THSC will lead the fight on a wide variety of fronts in the defense of parental rights, including screening all of the legislation filed in the 84th Session and working with other conservative groups to ensure that parental rights are protected in all areas of the law.



#### **Jeremy Newman**

#### Position: Public Policy Director

Jeremy graduated as a lifelong home school student and now lives in Dallas, where he teaches Lincoln-Douglas debate in the NCFCA, a national home school speech and debate league. Jeremy worked as a policy analyst on the 2013 THSC Watchmen team and began working full-time as the director of public policy for THSC in the fall of 2013.

#### **Isaac Sommers**

#### Position: Lead Policy Analyst

Isaac, a 2014 home school graduate, is a student at Howard Payne University in Brownwood, where he is pursuing a double major in public policy and social science. He currently works as co-owner of Integrity Communication Speech & Debate Camps and is the sole owner of Ziggy Online Debate, an online, preseason competition for NCFCA debaters. Isaac participated in NCFCA speech and debate for more than six years.

#### **Greg Guggenmos**

#### Position: Policy Analyst

Greg served as a research intern with THSC, leading the judicial research team, before joining the THSC Watchmen. Greg is especially interested in working on the Tim Tebow Bill, which allows home schoolers to compete on their local high school teams. Greg will graduate from home schooling in 2015. After serving as a THSC Watchman, he plans to major in economics or public policy, and is considering attending either Stanford University or Southern Methodist University.

#### **Ryan Parke**

#### Position: Policy Analyst

Ryan Parke is a 2013 home school graduate, currently enrolled in the Alamo Community College System and working his way to a degree in computer science and information security, which he intends to get from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Having been home schooled his entire life, Ryan is passionate about protecting parents' right to educate their children, as well as about other issues pertaining to family rights.

#### **Joshua Newman**

#### Position: Grassroots Coordinator

Joshua was home schooled and graduated in 2014. He is an avid writer and aspiring programmer but also holds a great passion for bringing the conservative Christian worldview back into the political limelight, both state- and nationwide. In the 2014 election, he worked with multiple local campaigns in North Texas.

#### **Stephen Howsley**

Ryan Parke

#### Position: Public Relations Coordinator

Before graduating high school in 2013, Stephen participated in Texas Youth and Government through the YMCA as a youth state representative, debating on the Texas House floor and passing his bill unanimously in committee. He also currently serves as the coordinator for the Junior Youth and Government program at the Richardson YMCA and as an assistant scoutmaster for Boy Scout Troop 437. Stephen is a sophomore at Richland College and plans to attend Texas A&M University to pursue a degree in business marketing or management with a minor in political science.



Phen Howsley

aac Sommer

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### **Small-Town Author**

by John R. Ericksor

Both H.R. Rookmaaker, the Dutch scholar, and his friend Francis Schaeffer noted that one of the defining characteristics of modern and postmodern art is its sense of estrangement and alienation. We might say that it's art without a home.



Art that is not rooted in a place is accountable to no one, and artists can become disembodied spirits that haunt the night with words and images that are jagged, out of focus, asymmetrical, dissonant, unnatural, and harmful to the human spirit.

I grew up in the small town of Perryton in the Texas Panhandle. When I went off to college in 1962 I never dreamed that I would return—or that I would become an author. For eight years I lived in metropolitan areas—Austin, Denver, New York, and Boston—and enjoyed the experience of being a stranger in a strange land.

I got involved in the Civil Rights Movement and the protests against the war in Vietnam, and I drifted away from the faith of my parents. In my second year at Harvard Divinity School I took a fiction-writing course and began writing short stories and novels. They were typical of the times: jagged, angry stories about places that didn't belong to me, written for people I didn't know.

I didn't understand that where you live shapes what you see and how you interpret what you see. In cities I had no compass, no clear sense of direction. I wrote from the head and lost contact with the broad motifs that, until recent decades, were described as "God's design for the world."

My writing began to change when my wife Kris and I moved back home to Perryton and settled into life in rural America. I worked for eight years as a ranch cowboy and wrote humorous stories about the things I saw and did. In 1983 we self-published a short novel narrated by a ranch dog who called himself the Head of Ranch Security.

Today, 30 years later, that first book has grown into a series of funny stories for families and children, and my life has become a thread in the tapestry of a small community. Kris and I raised three children here. We buried both my parents and her mother in the cemetery south of town, and I have become something I had never heard of: a small-town author.

The people in my community not only became the subjects of my stories but also the end-users, the customers. Once they figured out that I wasn't going to use art as a weapon to ridicule them and attack their values, they supported my efforts and took pride in my success.

Living next door to my audience gave me the opportunity to trace art back to its source—and to think about what a story is and should accomplish. A story is a frame we build around experience. Events outside the frame might be chaotic and absurd, but what occurs inside the frame is not. Art brings structure to experience.

On an unconscious level, a structured story teaches that how we live our lives does matter and that the decisions we make do have consequences. The mere presence of story structure makes a profound statement about moral order: that it exists!

I find evidence of that order in church. During the Sunday morning service we sing hymns and pray for healing and wisdom. We listen to a Gospel lesson that was translated from Greek, hear a reading from the Old Testament that was translated from Hebrew, and follow the events of the liturgical year, involving a small-town rabbi who spoke Aramaic in a backwater region of the Roman Empire.

Through music, prayer, liturgy, architecture, and scripture, we participate in a tradition that has been going on for 20 centuries—back to the days when Christians were meeting in caves beneath the streets of Rome. We repeat creeds and rituals that have survived persecution and theological upheavals. We nurse embers of memory about a Man who never wrote a book, led an army, won a battle, owned property, or held a public office.

Sometimes my gaze drifts toward the vaulted church ceiling, a space that allows the mind to soar, and I recall one of my favorite verses from the Psalms: "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained: what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:3-4)

I doubt that a mortal being has ever asked a deeper question, or expressed it with such stunning simplicity. It's a question you won't likely hear anywhere but in church.

During these flights of imagination I have invented new Hank the Cowdog stories, created characters, and solved plot problems. I composed the coyote song "Rotten Meat" during one of Jack Riley's sermons and wrote the words on the back of a church bulletin.

Or my eyes might be fixed on the arch-shaped stained glass window at the rear of the church. It was built back in the Forties, and I don't suppose anyone in our congregation remembers the name of the craftsman who made it, but it's beautiful. I notice its geometric form and the way the images are illuminated by sunlight at 11:30 in the morning.

And always, in every service, I study the faces in the congregation and think about the continuity of generations. In our small-town church, we have the opportunity to observe the transitions of human development at close range. As a member of the choir, sitting at the front and facing the congregation, I have a ringside seat.

One of the ushers at the rear of the church is approaching 80 years of age. I have faint memories of Don when he was a football star in

our high school. He became captain of his football team at TCU, and our town was so proud when he played in the Cotton Bowl! That must have been 1954. I watched that game on the first television set I had ever seen.

My old high school principal sits with his wife on the south side of the church—always in that spot, in their pew. He knew me when I was a teenage donkey, and if I have become something better, he deserves some of the credit. Fifty-two years after I graduated I still address him as Mr. Zoller. He will never be "George" to me.

Sara, who sings alto in our church choir, was two grades ahead of me in school. Her husband Charles was in my sister's graduating class, and his father was my Scoutmaster, a kind and patient man. We held our pack meetings in the basement of this church. There, we planned our camping trips and received our badges in front of proud parents.

Two of our children, Ashley and Mark, were baptized at this altar. Around the age of three they began going up for the children's sermon. Before we knew it, they and the other members of their graduating classes sat at the front of the church, dressed in caps and gowns, bright-eyed and eager to go out and see the world. In 1990 our family sat in those same front pews during my father's funeral service.

As I get older, I find it hard to hold back tears during weddings and funerals. It makes me feel silly, but I can't help it. Those services overwhelm me with memories of children, parents, and grandparents—members of the community to which I belong.

One thought that comes to my mind is that art, as I practice it, is a vocation. I write books for the people in my community and church. Our lives are stitched together by threads of love, trust, memory, and tradition, and they deserve my best efforts as a writer. My art should make them better, not worse.

What goes on in our little church, in our little town, has become the template for my stories: the liturgy of creation, life, death, and resurrection. This is where it all begins, because what we do in our churches is Art at its most basic level. It is not estranged, alienated, disembodied, or impersonal. It has a purpose, because it has a Source.

I can't say that everyone can or should become a small-town artist, but the model has worked well for me. Every artist needs a good home, and every small town needs the redemptive power of art.



Erickson and his wife Kris live on a cattle ranch northeast of Amarillo. He has written about his mother's family in the book Prairie Gothic, available at www.hankthecowdog.com. Erickson and his sidekick, Hank the Cowdog, will be back again this year at the THSC State Convention & Family Conference in The Woodlands.



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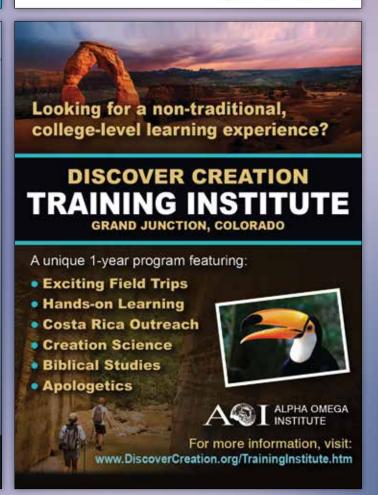
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News and Notes

During the past quarter THSC staff has continued to work tirelessly, protecting home schooling and parental rights, advocating for members, and Keeping Texas Families Free.

#### **THSC Watchmen**

Late January 3, six young men from across Texas arrived at their rent house in Austin where they will live for the next five months. The Texas Home School Coalition chose these specific home school graduates as the 2015 THSC Watchmen because of their proven character, abilities, dedication, and their passion for protecting parental rights and home schooling families across Texas.

The THSC Watchmen will represent Texas home schoolers at the Capitol in Austin during the 84th Texas Legislative Session, January 13 through June 1. They will do so by lobbying for legislation that promotes parental and home schooling rights and against legislation that would inhibit the prosperity of the family and the home schooling community in Texas.

The two primary legislative focuses of the THSC Watchmen are the Tim Tebow Bill and the Texas Parental Rights Restoration Act. The

Tim Tebow Bill, if passed, would allow Texas home school students to participate in sports and extracurricular activities within the University Interscholastic League (UIL) through the public school district in which the student lives. The Texas Parental Rights Restoration Act, if passed, would close loopholes in the Family Code that allow vindictive in-laws to take children from the custody of fit parents.

The success of the THSC Watchmen assisting the passage of this legislation hinges on the team creating and maintaining relationships with each of the state representatives and senators. Additionally, the team will testify in committee on certain legislation pertaining to their objective of promoting family rights. The THSC Watchmen will continue to keep the public up-to-date on new developments in the weeks to come. For more information, please visit thsc.org/watchmen.

#### The "Tim Tebow" Bill

Under current Texas law, all residents must pay property taxes, which are used to fund University Interscholastic League (UIL) extracurricular activities in which many public schools participate. However, home school families – who also pay property taxes – are currently prohibited from letting their students compete in UIL extracurriculars (athletics, music, debate, and others). To fight this discriminatory policy, THSC is supporting the "Tim Tebow" bill this legislative session to help give home schoolers who already pay for and want to participate in UIL activities the option to do so. Similar bills have

been passed in 30 other states, and all of them enjoy greater home schooling freedom as a result.

This bill is supported by many home schoolers in the state, as evidenced by this petition on Change.org started by a home school parent. To hear some of the common questions about the bill answered, see THSC's recent blog post on the Tim Tebow bill, called "Why Tim Tebow is Great for Home Schoolers."

#### Support to Families

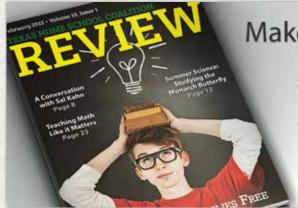
Texas Home School Coalition continues to help its members day in and day out with various issues they face as a result of home schooling. Recently the Department of Veterans Affairs threatened to discontinue benefits for a Texas home schooler unless the parents submitted evidence of school attendance. However, as the THSC Association regularly affirms, Texas law considers home schooled high school students in attendance, without need of verification. In a letter, THSC Association President Tim Lambert promptly informed the Department of Veteran Affairs about academic standards and school attendance laws in the state of Texas.

THSC stepped in recently when the Harris County Sheriff's Office halted the application of a home school graduate because he did not have an accredited high school diploma. Fortunately for Texas families, Texas law not only states that no home school diploma can be accredited by the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission,

but also that a home school diploma is equivalent to a public school diploma.

To address the situation, THSC President Tim Lambert wrote a letter to the Harris County Sheriff's Office supporting the former student, clarifying that home schools are legally equivalent to private schools in the state of Texas, and urging the office to end its discriminatory practice.

In another case, when a home school student's Social Security benefits were dropped due to the student turning 18 and not attending a standard school, the family contacted THSC requesting help. President Tim Lambert quickly responded to this member family's request with a letter to the Social Security Administration in support of the student. Texas law states that home schools are private schools and therefore benefits should extend until a student graduates.



Make sure you check out the online edition of THE REVIEW.

We are now offering an expanded edition online each quarter. You'll find more of the same great articles you've come to expect from us. And, we've added a new feature: a kid's activity page that you can print. So go online to thsc.org/review and check out all the extras.

This month's feature online edition is the expanded Conversation with Sal Khan. Learn more about the Khan Academy and what it can do for you family.

#### **Tutt Family Update**

In recent weeks Ms. Cecelia Wood, a family law attorney, has represented the Tutt family at numerous hearings for the children and has also filed a second action with the Fifth Court of Appeals in Dallas. This "writ of mandamus" asks the higher court to free the Tutt family from government interference, in light of the earlier court ruling that the children were unlawfully removed in the first place. The first action filed was denied in short order for lack of an official transcript, which the Tutts were lawfully entitled to but which Judge Callahan delayed providing for months. These were months during which the Tutts' children remained separated from their parents.

A biological sister of two of the Tutt children already adopted remains in foster care, where she has been for more than a year now. She continues to be reprimanded for saying her last name is "Tutt" but is allowed to visit her two siblings on a weekly basis. Her legal adoption was underway in Tarrant County during the two years she

lived with the Tutts, prior to being taken from their home, along with the other children. The pending adoption was dispensed without any notification to the Tutts at all.

CPS seems to be working aggressively to prevent the Tutts from this adoption. The child's biological mother (in jail, charged with murder) had previously signed a document waiving her parental rights and agreeing to allow the Tutts to adopt her three children. At the hearing on January 5, CPS presented a man whom they believe may be the child's father. He has not been employed for more than a decade, and there are other significant issues. Regardless of these grim facts, CPS is working to provide DNA evidence that he is the father, apparently to place the child with him rather than the Tutts. CPS did not have evidence of fatherhood, and the entire trial was postponed until April 22, 2015.





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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

Feb 5, 2015

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thsc.org/capitol-days

May 7-9, 2015

Arlington

THSC Convention - Arlington

Texas Home School Coalition (THSC)

thsc.org/convention

Feb 12-14, 2015

Fort Worth

**Great Homeschool Convention** greathomeschoolconventions.com/ locations/fort-worth-tx/

Jul 16-18, 2015

**Teach Them Diligently** teachthemdiligently.net/ homeschool-conventions/2015/

dallas-tx

Mar 12, 2015

Austin

**THSC Capitol Days** 

Texas Home School Coalition

thsc.org/capitol-days

May 7-9, 2015

Arlington

THSC Convention -

Arlington

Texas Home School Coalition (THSC)

thsc.org/convention

April 8, 2015

Austin

**THSC Capitol Days** 

**Texas Home School Coalition** 

thsc.org/capitol-days

Jul 23-25, 2015

The Woodlands

THSC Convention -

Woodlands

Texas Home School Coalition (THSC)

thsc.org/convention

#### THSC Association Membership Benefit Providers

The following companies offer discounts and benefits to THSC Association members. Find out more at THSC.org.

Blue Cross/Blue Shield **Health Insurance** bcbstx.com CollegePlus collegeplus.org Creation Illustrated creationillustrated com **Discover Texas** 

discovertexasonline.com

Driver Ed in a Box driveredinabox com **Education Plus** homeschooltranscripts.com **FEAST** 

homeschoolfeast.com **HEP Bookstore** hepbookstore.com

**Homeschool Spanish Academy** HomeschoolSpanishAcademy.com

**Liberty Mutual** libertymutual.com

Mega Mortgage of Texas THSCmortgage.com

MiQuotes.com

My Favorite Campground MyFavoriteCampground.com Samaritan Ministries samaritanministries.org TeenPact Leadership Schools teenpact.com
THSC Association

UberSmart Software miquotes.com ubersmartsoftware.com

The Texas Home School Coalition (THSC) is a 501(c)(3) educational organization that is supported by tax-deductible donations. THSC is dedicated to serving the home school community; it promotes home education in Texas by educating the public, the home school community, and officials about home schooling.

THSC Association, a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization dedicated to serving and protecting the home school community of Texas, is supported by membership fees (not taxdeductible) and sales of resources. The Association now offers legal assistance in regard to home education issues as a benefit to its members, along with several other benefits and discounts.

The work of the THSC PAC (Political Action Committee) endorsing and supporting pro-home schooling candidates is supported by donations that are not tax-deductible. See thscpac.org for more information.



## Protecting the rights of parents and the sanctity of the family for over 28 years

Protecting the Family

Through the Defense of Parental Rights in the Courts, in the Legislature, & in the Election Process Defending a Parent's Choice in Education

Through Working Relationships with Numerous State Agencies and Officials Fighting for the Equal Treatment of Home Schoolers

> Through Intervention in Cases of Discrimination

Supporting & Educating Families

Through Events, Publications, and Personal Communication

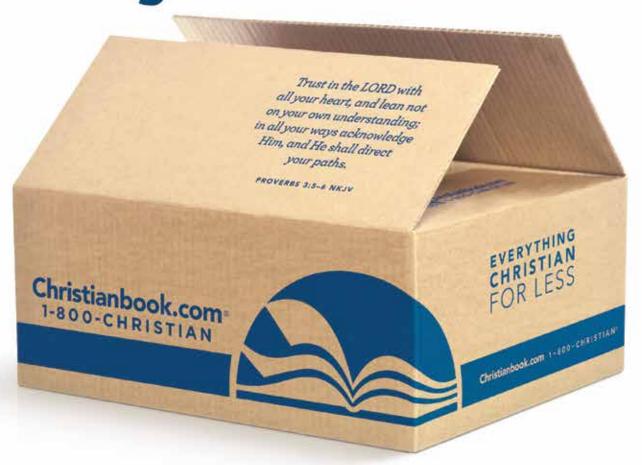


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