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Dr. Helen Jackson

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IN TEXAS HOMESCHOOLING HISTORY



TEXAS
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COALITION

FALL 2017
VOLUME 21, ISSUE 4
www.THSC.org

A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a pink shirt and blue skirt, sits on a metal bench in a lush garden. She is smiling and looking towards an older woman with short brown hair, wearing a colorful patterned top and white pants. The woman is also smiling and looking back at the girl. They are surrounded by green foliage and a house is visible in the background.

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The articles in this magazine reflect the freedom of home educators in Texas to choose from a wide variety of homeschool philosophies and teaching methods. Opinions and attitudes expressed in articles do not necessarily reflect the beliefs of the Texas Home School Coalition Association. THSC does not endorse or advocate any one method or philosophy. The board encourages each home educator to seek God's will in determining what is best for him, his school and his students.

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President's Review

By Tim Lambert



I am never prouder to be a part of the Texas homeschooling community than when we pull together to help each other in times of need.

When wildfires swept through the Texas Panhandle in March and Hank the Cowdog author John Erickson lost his home—along with many other families in the area—the homeschool community from around the state gave generously to help them recover and rebuild.

Then came another devastating event this summer when Hurricane Harvey tore through Southeast Texas. Homeschoolers from all over the state of Texas (and beyond) poured out aid for the people of Rockport, Houston and surrounding areas. Many families in the homeschool community were affected by this disaster, including THSC team members who were in the thick of the relief efforts.

Complete recovery from Harvey will take a long time. We should all continue to pray and help however we can—even after news headlines move on to other events.

I've also seen homeschoolers pull together outside of crisis events. Together, we achieved a major victory for parental rights during the special session of the Texas Legislature this summer. Senate Bill 11 passed to Governor Abbott's desk, ensuring that parents, not doctors, make critical life-sustaining decisions for their children. This important bill empowers families to protect their children as they see fit.

Another way we can continue to exercise our strength in numbers and raise up the next generation of leaders is with THSC Rangers Clubs—local homeschool groups that learn together about civics, government and get involved in the political process. THSC offers THSC Partner Groups a program designed to fit seamlessly into co-op schedules or run independently, complete with lesson plans, curriculum and projects. Please visit THSC.org/Rangers to find a club in your area or learn how to start your own! When the political elections begin in earnest early next year, THSC Rangers will be prepared to hit the ground running!

Together, this is how we continue *Keeping Texas Families Free!* ■



Inside This Issue ...

"With the advent of autocorrect and spell check, some educators assert that it is no longer necessary to teach spelling. However, ... spelling builds the foundation for phonetic teaching and rules of reading English."

Naomi Bradley p. 10

"Probably hoping to demonstrate that some homeschooling parents were not qualified to teach their children, the school districts' attorneys asked Helen about her educational background and work history. This was one witness they greatly underestimated."

Abigail Thomsen p. 24

"Modern homeschooling has a wide array of options because there are many "schools of thought" in home education—all with merit."

Alisha Mattingly p. 32

"He dutifully burned through the science books and asked intelligent questions, but he was clearly much more interested in watching science videos. Ack! Mom panic. Was this okay? Did it count as real school?"

Christa Bedwin p. 40

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Two Testimonies of THSC's Service to Homeschoolers

I can't say enough about your organization. I reached out to THSC for advice to help me with my special needs son. Not only did a THSC Special Needs Team member promptly respond by taking my call and giving me solid, Christian advice, she went further...

Within hours, I received an email confirming the advice given was the best option. This put my mind at rest because I had to go up against a school district at an admission, review and dismissal (ARD) meeting. I followed the advice and now I'm moving on to the task at hand: home-schooling my special needs son and my daughter.

Because of THSC, I am confident of how I am going to proceed when I withdraw my son from his school district.

This kind of dedication by your organization goes well above and beyond my expectations. I said this at the THSC Convention and I say it now: THSC is an answer to my prayers!

I am so blessed to have met such wonderful, caring individuals and I look forward to a successful academic school year with my children because of THSC!

- Sandra B.

My husband, Justin, and I attended our first homeschool conference in The Woodlands over a dozen years ago. That was when we only had two little ones. I do not think we have missed a year since, whether attending the regional FEAST, THSC Convention or both.

THSC and FEAST put on fantastic leadership training, which has absolutely enhanced the framework for building the foundation of two support group/mentoring initiatives that I am about to undertake.

With seven children, it was wonderful to be able to offer choices for the weekend, too.

- Our oldest wanted to participate in the teen program for the first time, and she was so blessed by that decision to learn under the leadership of Nathan Macias.
- Our 11 and 14 year olds attended the five Creation Science sessions by Scott Lane. They cannot stop themselves from sharing new Biblical evidence they've acquired.

- Two of our elementary-aged children expressed interest in the children's program. They had such fun learning more about their great state of Texas and developing new friendships.

For us, Tim and Lyndsay Lambert are always a blessing sharing such vast legal and pragmatic wisdom.

Attending a homeschool conference is like an annual pep talk.

We know that we need to refresh our vision from time to time in order to homeschool well. Our desire is for others to sincerely consider attending a homeschool convention. It might provide just what you need to make a big difference in your family and the upcoming homeschool year. ■

- Susan I.



Teaching your *Very Young Child to Read*

By Naomi Bradley

*T*he famous writer and politician Richard Steele once stated: “Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”

Reading is essential for functioning in the world around us and is critical for thinking and reasoning skills. Nonetheless, teaching this most basic skill is a daunting and difficult task for many home educators. Teaching reading mastery, however, is far less difficult when the child is taught beginner literacy skills at a very young age.

Parents committed to homeschooling often start intentionally educating their children from the cradle with brain stimulating classical music and red, white, and black mobiles. Yet, many of these same parents wait to begin formal reading instruction until ages of five or six years—missing the critical years of brain development and periods for foundational skills development and literacy exposure.

In my book “Reading at ONE!: A Guide to Early Literacy Exposure for Toddlers and Children,” I cover a variety of strategies to get children reading at an early age. Here are three strategies that are sure to get your homeschooled child reading early.

Photos by Abigail Thomsen, AbigailPhotography.com



Create a Print Rich Environment for Your Child

Children are sponges for information. Purposefully and intentionally place words and letters in the line of your children's sight. Determining their line of sight by squatting down on their level or getting on your knees to see what they see.

Labeling is an effective way to create a print-rich environment. Label objects your student uses daily to encourage the mastery of high frequency words. Whether you homeschool in a separate room or in the kitchen, you can increase vocabulary and sight words by labeling with flash cards, tape, or post-its, which can be placed on things such as doors, door-knobs, tables, desks, boxes of crayons, the floor and walls.

You can also create a print-rich environment by using anchor charts, used mainly to recognize goals and review concepts. When your child is very young—age 1 through 3 years old—use a simple anchor chart such as an alphabet chart to emphasize the letter sounds when teaching and reviewing.

Segment Words While Reading

Segmenting simply means breaking words down into individual sounds or syllables. It is different from blending, which involves pulling together individual sounds or syllables with-

in words. Segmenting is easily modeled and highly effective when used while reading to your child.

Once your student has mastered identifying all the letters and letter sounds, begin incorporating modeling or demonstrating segmenting while reading to your little one.

Segmenting words is easily done with almost any text—fiction and nonfiction. My book, "Big Book of Beginner Reading Stories," has small passages that can be used to demonstrate segmenting and modeling.

For example, if the sentence reads, "The fat cat sat on a mat," take some of the words in that sentence and sound them out. Read aloud, segmenting the sounds: "The f-a-t, fat, c-a-t, cat, s-a-t, sat, on a m-a-t, mat." Modeling reading strategies is even more critical than modeling fluent reading in the early years of teaching your child.

Audibly Spell Frequently Used Words

With the advent of autocorrect and spell check, some educators assert that it is no longer necessary to teach spelling. However, spelling is critical to beginner level reading instruction. Spelling builds the foundation for phonetic teaching and rules of reading English.

One simple and effective way to incorporate spelling into your literacy instruction is to spell aloud words that you use often with your child. Spelling is a transferable skill, which translates to both reading and writing. Therefore, it is critical to spell words aloud for your child as much as possible to foster early reading.

In my homeschool co-op, whenever one of my students' godmother picks her up, she always asks the child if she wants to go to the p-a-r-k. By spelling out that word consistently, the child, of course, memorized the spelling of the word "park" and transferred and referenced the spelling skill to writing and reading.

Although reading is a skill that develops at a different pace for every student, there are effective strategies that can help your student excel at reading at a young age. Be sure to exercise the mind of your child through reading. It will make a huge difference later in their development. ■



Hailed as the "Queen of Toddler Teaching," Naomi Bradley is the author of the breakout book "Reading at ONE! A Guide to Early Literacy Exposure for Toddlers and Children." She has been featured on numerous BlogTalkRadio shows, podcasts and television broadcast such as "A Woman's Place" on Atlanta Interfaith Broadcast. She is married with four beautiful children. Find Naomi Bradley on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @naomihbradley.

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10 Simple Ways to Raise Kids Who Love to Read

Lisa A. Beach

New research from sources such as the “National Endowment for the Arts Annual Basic Survey” points to a downward trend in recreational reading, particularly among teens and young adults. The survey also notes an alarming decline in reading among college graduates.

One method to stem the tide of this disturbing trend is to instill the love of reading in your kids from a very young age, creating an intrinsic motivation to read.

In the article, “Can Reading Logs Ruin Reading for Kids?” at TheAtlantic.com, clinical psychologist Erica Reischer asserts that required reading may destroy a child’s love of reading.

“When motivation to do an activity comes from outside, via rewards or mandates, it tends to undermine people’s interest in doing that activity for its own sake,” writes Reischer. “This decline in motivation ultimately affects enjoyment, creativity and even performance.”

Fortunately, there’s a lot you can do to foster the love of reading in your home. Let these ideas jump-start your own family’s love affair with books as you raise kids who love to read!

1. Be a reader role model.

Make sure your kids see you reading frequently, whether it’s the newspaper in the morning, a magazine while dinner is cooking, or your favorite novel before bed. Bring books with you everywhere you go—from a small paperback you stuff in your purse to a few magazines you stash in the car to a Kindle loaded with books for your next family vacation. Make books a habit in your own life first.

2. Read to your kids every day—it’s like a daily vitamin for their brain!

If you need some ideas for good, age-appropriate books, check out notable book lists from the Association for Library Service to Children, Common Sense Media, Time Magazine, Good Reads and New York Public Library. At Christian-Books.com, look under the Homeschool tab for “Classic Lit K-8” and “Classic Lit 9-12.”

3. Make friends with your local public library and visit it regularly.

Besides allowing you to borrow books for free, many libraries offer lots of child-centered programs. When raising your kids to love reading, consider taking your children to:

storytime; puppet shows; magic shows; arts-and-crafts workshops; chess clubs; summer reading programs; book clubs; teen councils.

This will help your kids view the library as the place to go for fun and learning.

4. Fill your home with books.

Yes, fill up your home with books! Put reading material in baskets and on shelves all over the house—in the living room, the family room, the bathroom, etc.

5. Keep reading together once your kids can read by themselves.

Sure, you want to applaud individual milestones and encourage solo reading. But, the many benefits of being read to continue to accrue, even as kids get old enough to read on their own.

To read more about this interesting idea, read the New York Times article, “Study Finds Reading to Children of All Ages Grooms Them to Read More on Their Own.” Plus, reading together creates treasured bonding time for you and your kids!



6. Create a comfy reading nook.

Perhaps you've got a cozy window seat with great natural light streaming through. Or maybe you've got a beanbag chair you can place next to a basket of books. Even just one comfortable chair will work. Add soft pillows, a blanket to snuggle with and good lighting for the perfect reading getaway to help cultivate a love of reading in your children.

7. Get kids hooked on a series.

For younger readers: "Magic Tree House," "Judy Moody," "Encyclopedia Brown," "Boxcar Children"

For middle schoolers:

"Big Nate," "The 39 Clues," "Chronicles of Narnia"

For older teens:

"Lord of the Rings," "The Hardy Boys," "Nancy Drew"

8. Don't rule out comic books and graphic novels.

Without the visual appeal of high-resolution graphics, sometimes it's hard to engage kids with a page full of words. Good comic books and graphic novels can be the gateway to good literature if kids equate reading with fun.

I can trace some of my favorite childhood memories to reading comic books and comic strip collections.

Comic Books:

"Archie at Riverdale High," "Little Dot," "Little Lotta," "Casper the Friendly Ghost"

Comic Strip Collections:

"Calvin and Hobbes," "Peanuts," "Family Circus"

Now you can even find Christian content, classics and Shakespeare in manga Visit MangaClassics.com, ChristianBook.com, MangaShakespeare.com.

9. Borrow, rent or buy audiobooks.

Listening to a great audiobook without worrying about vocabulary or correct pronunciation offers a convenient and effortless way to get lost in a story. My boys' favorites were many classic titles like "King Arthur," "Arabian Nights," and "Rip Van Winkle," read by award-winning storyteller Jim Weiss.

Many public libraries offer free CDs to borrow as well as downloadable MP3s or streaming audio. Although you can purchase many audiobooks on iTunes and join paid subscription services like Audible, you can also take advantage of free audiobooks from services that include some children's titles but mostly classics for older kids and adults. These websites



include: OpenCulture.com, ThoughtAudio.com, Lit2Go.com and Scribl.com.

10. Cap off a favorite book with special treats and activities.

You can encourage your children to read by tying special food and activities to what's found in great books.

Treat and Book Pairings:

Blueberry pie with "Blueberries for Sal"

Orange slices with "Very Hungry Caterpillar"

Peach cobbler with "James and the Giant Peach"

Activity Ideas:

Clue-finding mission with "Nancy Drew" or "Hardy Boys"

Visit to a farm with "Charlotte's Web"

Do-it-yourself magic show with "Half Magic"

Salt-dough maps with "Scrambled States of America"

Overall, use these ideas to nurture your family's love affair with books, and you'll increase the odds of hooking your kids on a lifetime reading habit. ■



Lisa Beach is a freelance journalist, copywriter and recovering homeschool mom who lived to write about it. Check out her writer's website at LisaBeachWrites.com. A version of this article originally appeared on Parent.co and has been republished here with permission.

What I Learned From

Trying To Teach My Son To Read

By Leah Spina

My son Samson has the energy of a heavily-cafeinated hummingbird. So it was with great interest that I perused the 87,943 reading programs on the market when it was time to teach him how to read.

Apparently, there are a lot of ways to approach this task:

- Do we teach the letter names first or the letter sounds?
- Should we introduce capital letters simultaneously with the lowercase letters, or after?
- How long should we work on reading each day?

After reading “Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons,” I condensed it to five take-aways, because really, who has time for 100?

1. Choose Wisely

A wise homeschool veteran advised me over leafy greens one day at lunch: “Leah, choose a curriculum YOU like! You’re the one that has to mess with it each day!”

And so, I did. I am not crafty. I do not like messes. Maybe you love projects and hands-on learning. Whatever your passion, choose a reading program that you are excited to get out each day.

2. Give it a Break

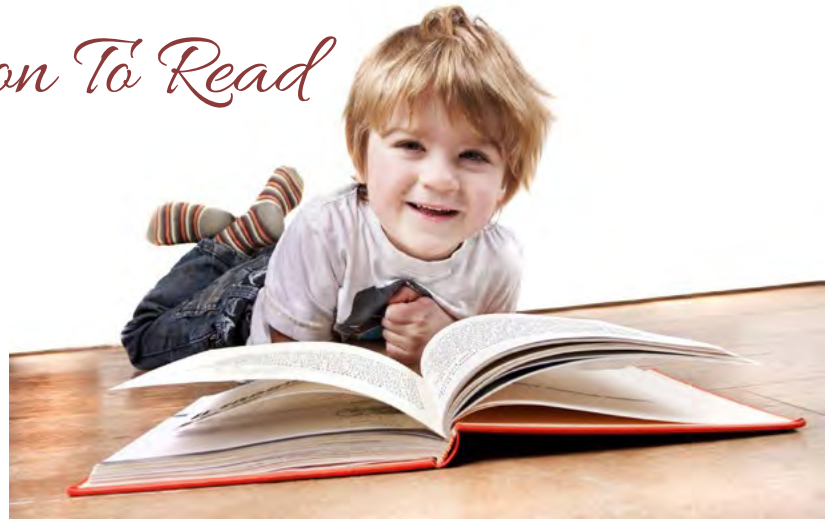
I started teaching Samson to read when he was four. And, y’all, he just wasn’t ready. The lessons were grueling, so I called up an older homeschool friend to ask what I was doing wrong. She told me he just might not be ready. So I put the book away for six months.

When we pulled it out again, it was a night and day difference. He was six months older, and six months more ready. If you’ve tried a few weeks with little progress, try taking a break until your child is a little older.

3. Remember, it’s Like a Foreign Language

When we start a reading lesson, I remind myself, “It’s like when you were learning Japanese, Leah.” The letters that are so familiar to you, those words that seem so easy, they are completely foreign to your little one.

Be patient. Be positive. Be gentle. Learning to read is like learning a foreign language!



4. Be Adaptable and Enthusiastic

Sometimes we learn to read outside. Sometimes we learn to read in the car. Sometimes I let him hold an object to get his energy out while we read on the couch. Don’t be afraid to change the atmosphere.

Encourage them! I pretend I am a huge audience roaring in applause if he does well. We laugh over stories that all begin, “THE BOY...” or “THE GIRL...” Or “THE MAN...” by yelling those first two words out loud together. Learning how to read doesn’t need to be boring!

5. Remember the End

Last summer I caught myself hesitating too long to help Samson sound out a word. It almost drove him to tears. He was trying, but just couldn’t do it. I learned a lesson that day.

The end goal is ensuring that your child not only reads well but loves reading. It also helps to never go over 20 minutes a day with reading. Just stop. If it helps, do one lesson over two days or repeat a lesson. If you or your child are getting frustrated, it’s time to stop for the day.

We want them to associate a love of learning with reading and that starts when they learn letters and sounds. Keep your lessons short and upbeat with your eyes on the end goal. ■



Leah Spina is a second-generation homeschooler. She lives in the Dallas/Fort Worth area with her husband of eight years, David, and their three children: Samson (6), Esther (3) and Hannah (1). She graduated from Thomas Edison State College with a degree in business administration and is a former journalist for WORLD magazine. She is an inspirational speaker and author of the Amazon bestseller “Stop and Smell Your Children: Laugh and Enjoy the Little Years.” You can follow her on social media or at LeahSpina.com.

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How Music Can Improve Writing & Relationships

By Jeffrey Pflaum

Play music, think clearly about things, and write about whatever happens while listening. This simple technique spurs creativity and promotes communication between people. It may also hold the key to forming a greater bond with your homeschool student.

- Are you looking to connect more deeply with your child?
- Has the relationship of teacher-student threatened to eclipse the more basic relationship of parent-child?
- Has that child whose every thought you were once able to predict become more guarded?

Homeschooling parent-teachers can use my innovative approach to develop better relationships with their children, along with improved focus, self- and other-awareness, and academic skills in writing, reading, thinking and creativity.

This original method for using music requires an open mind, because it is unconventional. Music listening and contemplating inner experiences takes kids to a new level of self-reflection, where they become avatars in landscapes of mind, imagination, body, heart and spirit. It is a tried and proven technique that I used with inner-city students for many years.

This technique in a one-on-one setting or small group situation fosters even greater intensity and better results. You, the parent educator, want to cultivate openness with your children, and you are the crucial link to make the potential connection work.

You should do the activity with your children to understand what they go through while listening to music, but it's best to do a dry run-through first without your student so that you will know what to expect and how to direct the experience.

How a typical contemplation music writing lesson works (for students in third grade or higher):

1. Allow your student to select some songs, then play your student's favorite music for 10 minutes.
2. While the music plays, student and parents close their eyes and contemplate (or *pay close attention* to) feelings, thoughts, ideas, memories, present-moment events, fantasies, day-dreams, dreams, reflections and physical sensations.



3. After listening and contemplating (no writing yet), everyone opens their eyes and takes a minute of “think time” to recall inner experiences that occurred while the music played, no matter how silly, “crazy” or deep they might have been.
4. Following this moment to reflect, it’s time to write. No holds barred.
5. Each person writes a contemplation of 50 words or more on a 4x6-inch index card. Contemplations can be something experienced, imagined or both. There is no correct answer.
6. Continue lessons twice a week throughout year, parents and children read contemplations orally to each other, and *both* can ask questions about their respective writings.

Discuss the Contemplations

A key to the activity is discussing the writings via a question-and-answer approach. It takes time to realize which questions will lead children—and parents—to greater self-awareness and *inner-sight*.

Sample questions include:

- Did you enjoy listening to music and contemplating experiences? Why?
- Was the contemplation experience easy or hard? Why?
- Did anything surprise or amaze you while contemplating?
- What were you thinking and feeling during the contemplation?

- Did you visualize or imagine anything while listening?
- Did a particular word come to mind while listening and contemplating? Give an example.
- Were you distracted, confused or feeling “lost” at any time?

Writing, contemplating and questioning might prove challenging at the start, but you should give it time to develop. This will change your child’s life—and yours.

Explore Pflaum’s techniques more in these articles:

- “Using ‘Music Writing’ to Trigger Creativity, Awareness, Motivation and Poetry” at Eductopia.org.
- “Contemplation Strikes an Emotional Chord with Kids” at ASCD.org. ■



Jeffrey Pflaum is a writer and educator with 34 years of experience in the New York City Dept. of Education. He has developed unique curriculum and projects for his students with a focus on developing young minds into focused and creative self-understanding students. Drawing on years of experience and unique approaches, Pflaum has written for newspapers, journals, magazines and more. Pflaum is the author of “Motivating Teen and Preteen Readers: How Teachers and Parents Can Lead the Way,” available on Amazon.com. Visit JeffreyPflaum.com for sample student contemplations and poetry.





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Blogging Improved My Child's Writing – **Maybe It Could Help Yours!**

By Kathryn Streeter

Does writing seem like a chore to your students? I have a solution to motivate even the most reluctant writer with the opportunity to share thoughts to a World Wide Web of readers. Here's how it worked in our homeschool.





around our home. Then, my son's eyes lit up when I suggested blogging on paper. As I suspected, blogging conveyed fun while writing a short essay did not.

"I'll only pay attention to your argument and how effectively you state your case. I don't care about spelling, grammar or punctuation," I said. My son's shoulders relaxed. I could sense him exhaling the tension. Friction between us over writing assignments abruptly came to a halt and I could breathe more easily, too.

How Writing Comes to Life Over Real Issues

My son's weekly assignment quickly became a hit because it released him to write freely without fear of messing up. Spelling in particular had paralyzed him, but now he wrote, unrestrained. I also let my son choose the topics that interested him, so long as he defended his position on the subject.

Since I gave him control over the topic, he owned his work in a new way. He felt energized and motivated. It was still an assignment, but it felt less like school for him. In fact, it went so well that I gradually nudged him towards two, sometimes three, posts per week.

In 2012, the presidential campaign was in full-motion, offering a well of political material for an opinionated kid. Then-Governor Mitch Daniels of Indiana, my husband's home state, was being pressed to run and we watched the news closely.

"Daniels and Obama are great speakers, but in terms of politics, Daniels can beat Obama very easily. He would be a very good president of the U.S.," my 9-year-old blogged. We will never know if his gut instinct was spot-on because Governor Daniels could not be persuaded to enter the race.

I was getting to know my son more deeply through these blogging exercises. His quick and unwavering resolve on a host of subjects—largely around politics or the NFL—revealed raw leadership material. Unlike me, my son was endowed with decisive intuition. He didn't waffle as he played judge over disparate controversies. He didn't see both sides. With certitude, he declared a winner.

Sometimes he dedicated his posts to situations closer to home. Following a sensitive local story blowing up the news, his post, "What Will Be the Punishment?"

When I first started homeschooling, things unfolded smoothly for me as a newbie teacher—I was really getting the hang of engaging and academically challenging my students. I was also passionate about their success and felt their progress in a personal way.

Then, year three hit and my 9-year-old son became a case study for which the curriculum offered no answers. In conversation, he was fluent and eloquent when debating an issue. But, his ease vanished when he had to write a short response to the material.

As I wracked my brain searching for a method to help grow his capacity to write, I glanced over my shoulder into my husband's home office. There he sat in his chair typing furiously—blogging! As editor of an online publication about public policy, he did a lot of blogging, so it was a familiar concept

My son's eyes lit up when I suggested blogging on paper. As I suspected, blogging conveyed fun while writing a short essay

Continued on pg. 23.

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Continued from pg. 20.

addressed the dicey subject of parents hosting house parties for their teen where alcohol is made available. Were the parents aware? Where does culpability lie? My son came down hard on the parents. “If the parents knew about the alcohol, they should pay a fine of \$15,000. It could cause a car crash,” he wrote. He also recommended the teen spend three days in jail.

Even closer to home was our frustrating lemon of a washing machine, which broke a few times during this season of homeschooling. The cycle of making a service appointment, meeting the technician during the agreed window of time and then waiting for a part to arrive wore us all down. Our kids witnessed this repair-appointment-game intimately for the first time as homeschoolers. This served as a prompt for my son’s next blog post:

“I think that we should buy a new washing machine because this model is having a lot of problems. We could just buy a new one and refund the other one. I think that’s what we should do,” he wrote. And we did.

Reflections on How Writing Energized My Son

When I look through this old file containing my son’s blog posts handwritten in his laborious cursive, there’s a weird catch in my throat because this little guy is now a young man in high school. He could start shaving any day!

I’m struck by how these exercises helped teach him the art of developing an argument, whether for a paper or a speech (still his preference).

By writing a basic defense of his convictions, he was able to wrestle through issues he may not have confronted at all were it not for these blogging assignments.

In a tiny way, he’s who he is today because blogging seemed an effective writing hack at a time when I was groping for answers.

Turns out, it exceeded my expectations. ■



Kathryn Streeter is a wife, mother and writer. Follow her on Twitter @streeterkathryn.



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The Patriot’s Pen is an essay contest for students in 6th to 8th grades. This year’s theme is: “America’s Gift to my Generation.”

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Fame Forfeited: Dr. Helen Jackson's Journey from NASA to Homeschooling

By Abigail Thomsen

One by one, the attorneys representing 19 school districts in the landmark *Leeper v. Arlington ISD* case grilled homeschool parents in cross-examination. It looked like Texas homeschoolers would lose this case, and with it, their God-given right to educate their children at home.

Then, a young, African-American mother named Helen Jackson was called to testify. Probably hoping to demonstrate that some homeschooling parents

were not qualified to teach their children, the school districts' attorneys asked Helen about her educational background and work history. This was one witness they greatly underestimated.

"I was an aerospace electronics engineer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—and was accepted to be an astronaut candidate," Helen replied.

Pens hit the floor and jaws dropped. None of them would have presumed that this humble homeschooling mother of five had been the first African-American woman selected to be an astronaut!

“When she said that, you could sense an explosion—a quiet explosion—in the courtroom. Nothing of any sound, but very, very quiet. I was watching the judge, and he was having trouble containing himself with laughter,” observed Shelby Sharpe, the lead attorney for the Leepers.

Helen’s testimony helped “crack” the Leeper case, which affirmed the right of Texas families to homeschool.

In the early 1980s, Texas homeschoolers faced prosecution, jail time, fines and losing their children to Child Protective Services. Then, in March 1985, Attorney Sharpe filed a lawsuit against the Texas Education Agency and 1,100 school districts. Helen and her husband John served as witnesses in this class action suit.

The case took nearly 10 years to litigate and ultimately culminated in a 9-0 decision at the Texas Supreme Court in favor of homeschooling. So, how did Helen arrive at such a pivotal moment in history for homeschoolers? Here’s her amazing story.

Helen Jackson’s Early Life

Helen Murray grew up in poverty. “I was one of those kids who slipped through the cracks somehow—because I did not have either of my parents, and I had a grandmother who was at work as a live-in maid most of the time,” she recalls.

Her grandmother, one of many guardians who passed her around, held an eighth-grade education. Despite these insurmountable odds, Helen excelled academically. Several Ivy League schools invited her to interview, but sadly, she lacked the resources to make the trips. Instead, Helen married at a young age. Later, with three children, she fled an abusive spouse.

Eventually, she finished college and landed an engineering job at NASA, where she met and married John Jackson, a NASA engineer.

The Decision to Homeschool

Helen’s oldest children faced many challenges, having been born into an abusive situation and poverty. Baqiyyah and Malik were struggling in school and Malik became extremely withdrawn.

In 1983, the family relocated to Texas. Although satisfied with her career at NASA, a tiny advertisement about homeschooling was about to change the Jacksons’ lives.

Convicted both by her new Christian faith and a strong commitment to academic excellence, Helen made a decision:

“I am willing to give this career up because otherwise Malik is not going to make it.” She resigned from NASA and began homeschooling in fall 1983.

Not long after she started homeschooling, Helen got a call from NASA that took her breath away: “You’ve been selected!”

Years earlier, while working with space shuttle launch support, Helen applied for the astronaut program. She forgot about it during the years-long vetting process. But now the choice was in front of her: become the first African-American female astronaut and very possibly travel to outer space ... or homeschool Baqiyyah, Malik, Isa and Zakiya.

“I wanted to choke, because this was the dream of a lifetime,” Helen recalls.

She applied her scientific mind to the problem and researched the mistakes and successes of other scientists. During her research, Helen learned that Albert Einstein neglected his family terribly and she knew she did not want that for her family.

Helen Jackson put her family first—before NASA. “I couldn’t have been comfortable with national fame while my kids were just down, doing terrible,” Helen says. She knew that her children would have regressed without the support they needed had she returned to NASA to complete the astronaut training.

“I can’t do it. I just can’t do it,” she concluded. Crestfallen, she hung up the phone. “There’s that opportunity of a lifetime. I just let it go. But I got to do what I feel that God is telling me to do.”

Pregnant with Johnny, her fifth and youngest child, Helen was content with the decision she made to commit to the academic success and spiritual well-being of her children ... and she never looked back.

**None of them
would have
presumed that
this humble
homeschooling
mother of five
had been the first
African-
American
woman selected
to be an
astronaut!**

Reflections on Year 1 of Homeschooling

Both John and Helen sacrificed time, energy and reputation because of their decision to homeschool. They even went into isolation.

Helen was “condemned terribly” by her peers, especially when they found out she had forfeited her career to homeschool. “I did not have support—it was only from other homeschoolers that I had support,” she recalls.

When Helen began homeschooling, Malik was a sixth-grader performing at a third grade level. After just one year of homeschool, testing revealed that Malik was at 12th grade level! Not only was he soaring academically, but he became outspoken, vocal and happy. Once a fearful child, Malik began mingling with the neighborhood children. “He was a new person,” reflects Helen.

The entire family flourished in their new homeschool environment. Helen’s naturally gifted children skipped grades, took leadership roles in a number of the organizations they were involved in and began living in harmony with each other.

“It was a big sacrifice,” Helen comments, “but when you’re a parent, you give up whatever you got to give up for your children to succeed.” And succeed they did:

- Baqiyyah teaches at the West Virginia School of Medicine.
- Malik works in information technology and business management.
- Isa is a chemical engineer and owns a construction firm.

- Zakiya serves in leadership for a nonprofit organization.
- Johnny is a combat Marine veteran and economic consultant.

After some 17 years of homeschooling, and following the death of her husband in 2007, Helen returned to school to earn a master’s degree in physics, and eventually earned a Ph.D. from the Air Force Institute of Technology. Currently, she is a research physicist with the U.S. Air Force.

Looking back, does she regret giving up her career to homeschool? “No, no, no ... I’m really happy that God blessed me with the opportunity to do it.”

It was one of the most difficult decisions a person could ever make; even to this day, people still criticize her choice. Yet her children are proof she made the right decision in putting family first.

Homeschoolers in Texas are forever grateful to Helen for helping change the course of history. It may not have been in space, but she had just as much impact here on Texas soil defending the rights of families to educate our children as we see fit. ■

It was one of the most difficult decisions a person could ever make; even to this day, people still criticize her choice.



Abigail Thomsen is a homeschool graduate and a THSC sales representative. She loves Jesus, speaking Spanish and telling stories through photography and writing. As the oldest of seven children, she enjoys a busy life on her family’s small Texas homestead. Find her online at AbigailPhotography.com.

Taking a Stand in Texas: The Battle for Home School Freedom

Photo Courtesy Helen Jackson, Ph.D.



Now on YouTube: This documentary depicts the hardships and struggles of Texas families in the early days of the homeschool movement.

Watch Attorney Shelby Sharpe, lead counsel in *Leeper v. Arlington ISD*, describe the emotional impact that Jackson’s testimony made on him, and how it was a

pivotal moment in the landmark case that secured the right to homeschool in Texas.

The powerful segment starts at the one-hour mark. Simply search “Battle for Home School Freedom” at YouTube.com/TexasHomeSchool.

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Almost Aboard the Challenger



On January 28, 1986, Jackson and her children gathered around the television to watch the space shuttle Challenger take off. She recalls the emotion before the launch: "I was excited because I'm a big fan of the space program and of NASA."

When the Challenger exploded, Jackson was horrified to think of all the lives and talent that were lost.

Days later it occurred to her that if she would have accepted NASA's offer to become an astronaut, she might have been in the payload of the Challenger.

"Sometimes we don't understand why God tells us to not do certain things or to do certain things. Sometimes we don't find out in this lifetime. But I got a chance to see ... You just got to obey God and trust even when you don't understand."



Photo credits: Courtesy Kennedy Space Center (explosion); Courtesy NASA (launch)

A Broad Place for Special Needs Families

By Peggy Ployhar

Since moving to Texas three years ago, the scripture verse that has continually come before me is Psalm 18:19a: “He also brought me out into a broad place.”

Yes, everything is bigger in Texas and I just assumed that God was reminding me through this verse of how much I had to be thankful for in this great state.

Living and homeschooling in Texas has been a privilege, and beyond that, I’ve been able to use my experience to pour into special needs families who sought advice from the Texas Home School Coalition.

What started as a volunteer position quickly grew into leading a team dedicated to supporting and ministering to the needs of the Texas special education homeschooling community.

This explosive growth in ministry started to give more life and depth to my interpretation of Psalm 18:19a and how God was preparing me to move toward more expansive tools and support for special education homeschooling.

But, not until just a few months ago did I start to understand the magnitude of my next step in this journey. What happened? I caught hold of a vision for supporting families that is even bigger than this great state of Texas.

Vision to Reach Special Education Homeschoolers

In my heart, the vision of a new ministry was unfolding, and yet in my head, I was not able to reconcile how it could come to pass. In His wisdom, though, God worked out all the issues, and what resulted was a new national non-profit corporation called SPED Homeschool. THSC Special Needs Team will continue to provide consultations and support to THSC members and Texas families and THSC will advocate for special needs families in the legislature and otherwise. Meanwhile, SPED Homeschool will work to improve the availability and accessibility of special education homeschooling resources

to the public from the point of view of experienced special education homeschooling parents.

SPED will accomplish its mission by:

- **Sharing** relevant information and resources.
- **Educating** and **encouraging** newcomers to connect with their local, state and national resources.
- **Providing** online social groups.
- **Facilitating** both remote and local training opportunities.
- **Connecting** families with helpful services.
- **Furthering** the advancement of special needs homeschool education and support.

Led by homeschool parents who know what it’s like to live in the trenches, SPED Homeschool will develop tools and provide services that have been long needed in the special education homeschooling community.

While I leave you in the capable care of THSC’s Special Needs Team, I hope you will connect with my new endeavor group by visiting SPEDHomeschool.com. ■

Peggy Ployhar, SPED Homeschool CEO/Founder, is a frequent writer, speaker and blogger on special education homeschooling issues. Formerly THSC Special Needs Team Lead, MACHE (Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators) Special Needs Coordinator and MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) Area Coordinator for Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, Peggy is certified by the American Association of Christian Counselors and trained as a Precept Bible Study leader.

Peggy’s homeschool journey started when her oldest child was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. Now with 14 years of homeschooling under her belt, she thanks God for all the experiences He has given her so she can use them to encourage other special needs homeschooling parents.

Peggy and her husband Doug live in Conroe, Texas, where they still homeschool the youngest of their three children aged 20, 18 and 12.

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The Silver Lining on a Frustrating Special Legislative Session

By Joshua Newman

For THSC this summer, standing guard for homeschoolers meant heading back to Austin to defend parental rights during the special legislative session.

When the legislature failed to pass a number of important bills during the regular session that ended in May, Governor Abbott quickly called a special legislative session, naming 20 important agenda items to be addressed. Among these were two major parental rights issues:

DNR (Do-Not-Resuscitate) Order Reform

DNR orders have been used by physicians to prevent patients from receiving life-sustaining treatment they believe to be pointless—sometimes even over the objections of the patient or the patient's parents, as in the tragic case of baby Charlie Gard in the U.K.

Thanks to the support of the homeschool community, the efforts of THSC, other activists and organizations, and the providence of God, the DNR reform bill (SB 11) successfully passed and was signed by the governor! This was a major victory for families, who will now have the ability to decide the care of their children in life-threatening situations.

The Texas Privacy Act

This piece of legislation aimed to prevent cities, school districts and other local bodies from imposing rules that would put children of the opposite sex in the same restrooms against their parents' wishes.

Despite valiant efforts by conservative lawmakers, the Privacy Act joined a collection of conservative, pro-family legislation and was killed by the House leadership team during both the regular and special sessions.

Nonetheless, the legislative season ended on a hopeful note in that we identified the opponents of family values in Texas.

It has become abundantly clear that the current leadership of the Texas House of Representatives no longer represents conservative Texans. Furthermore, these same representatives do not respect parental rights.

Ironically, conservative reform was not stopped by partisanship this year. Rather, it was a group of Republicans,

led by Speaker of the House Joe Straus who worked together to stop these bills. In Austin we witnessed Speaker Straus and his group of lieutenants who chair important committees continually block conservative bills.

We came away from this special session with a clear distinction between lawmakers who value freedom for families and those who actively obstruct these reforms, setting the stage for the upcoming election cycle.

THSC is already working on the 2018 elections in which the homeschool community will have the opportunity to be a major contributor in bringing in new leadership that will faithfully work alongside us protecting families and upholding Texas values. This is how we can join together in *Keeping Texas Families Free!* ■

Joshua Newman serves as chief legislative analyst for Texas Home School Coalition.



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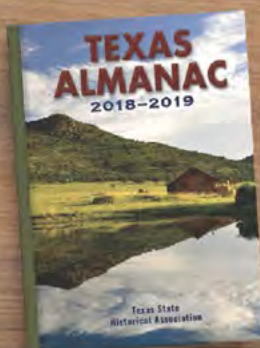
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Any Way You Want It:

A Spectrum of Homeschooling Options

By Alisha Mattingly

The stereotypical arrangement of a homeschooling family is often portrayed as a well-scrubbed bunch of children at home doing schoolwork at the kitchen table while mother or father oversees. However, modern homeschooling has a wide array of options that have come out of diverse “schools of thought” in home education—all with merit.

To a traditional homeschooler, labels such as “deschooling,” “unschooling” or “public school at home” may seem more like fads than philosophies. The key is understanding that options on the homeschooling spectrum mean greater freedom in education.

These freedoms also benefit parents who prefer traditional education for their children, but for whom life circumstances such as moving, having a baby or a long-term illness necessitate a flexible, hybrid schooling arrangement.

Those who have removed children from public school midway through the year, may opt to maintain a strict regimen in homeschooling to make for a smoother transition. Alternatively, a time for deschooling may repair damage that a classroom environment has done to natural curiosity.

Another flexible option is having children spend half their day in the traditional method, then giving them the freedom

that comes with unschooling during the other half. By understanding all the options, you can homeschool any way you want. Here are six flexible options for homeschoolers to consider.

Public School at Home

Some would not even consider this option to be homeschooling, but it is possible to keep your children at home while they attend public school.

Some school districts in Texas are now offering free, at-home, online schooling via a public school website. Students often follow the same curriculum as those in school.

Two statewide programs—Grapevine-Colleyville ISD’s iUniversity Prep (5th-12th grades) and Texas Virtual Academy (6th-12th grades)—offer students a learning coach in addition to teachers, online social and academic clubs, and accountability of the public school system. Parental involvement in this option is considerably higher than onsite public schools, but all the curriculum and instructional method choices are out of the parents’ control.



A Good Option: For parents who want to be with their children (or do not want their children to be in the classroom environment) but are not able or willing to commit to educating their children.

Hybrid Private/Homeschool

Next on the spectrum of school at home options is a hybrid approach that combines the structure and socialization of a private school experience with homeschooling.

Compared to traditional homeschooling, many of the choices are made for the parents, such as curriculum and course selection. Then, on home days, it's all on mom and dad, like typical homeschooling.

This option offers active involvement from parents with the accreditation, sports, choir, band, socialization, standardized testing, etc., that larger private schools can offer. A quick Google search will bring up many options in Texas such as Trinity Classical in Houston, Logos Preparatory Academy in Sugar Land and Legacy Preparatory Christian Academy in The Woodlands.

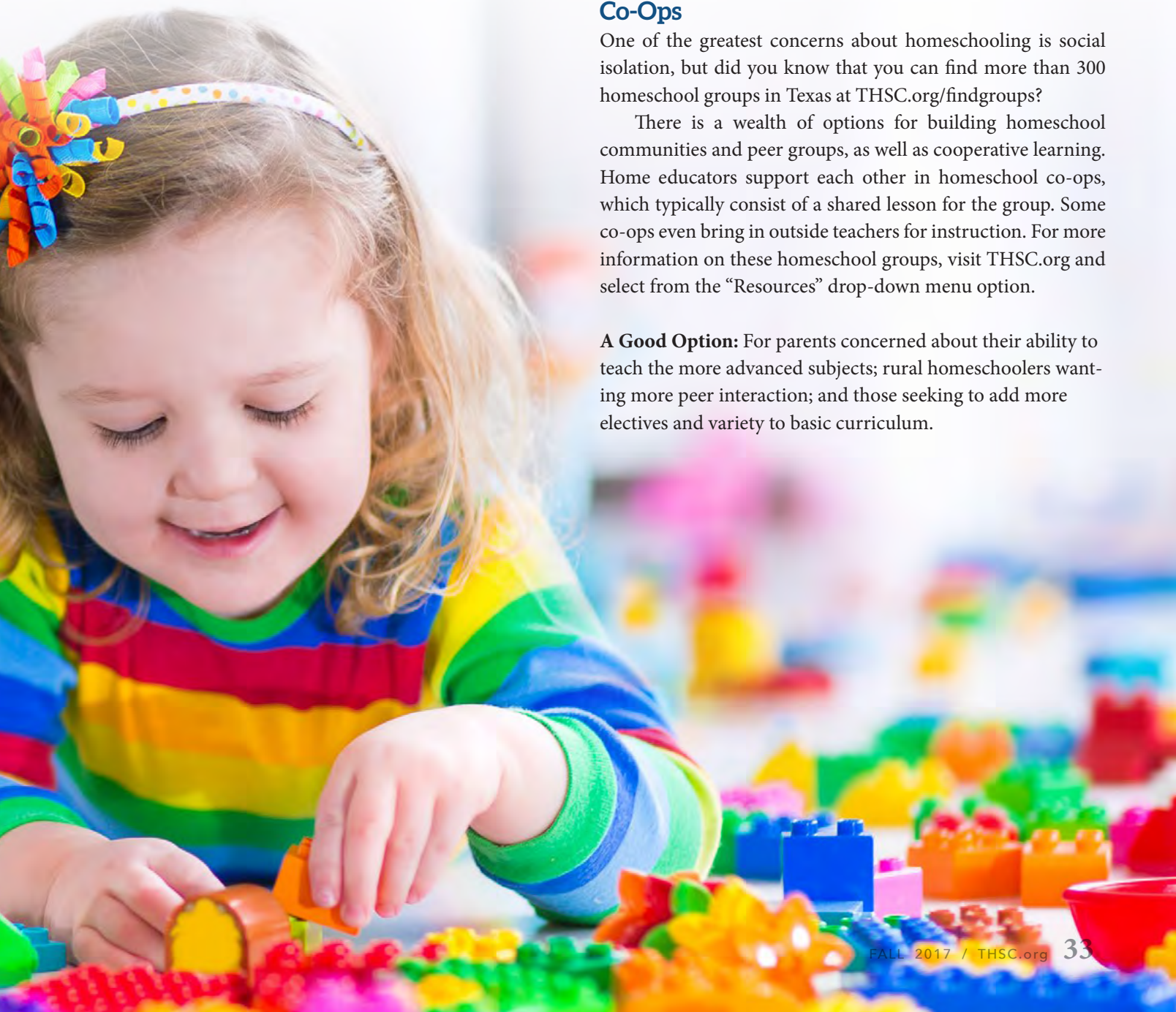
A Good Option: For parents who work but still want to homeschool. Or, for families that are concerned they might not be able to stick with the program on their own. This is also a great option for students who need to be around kids, such as an only child.

Co-Ops

One of the greatest concerns about homeschooling is social isolation, but did you know that you can find more than 300 homeschool groups in Texas at THSC.org/findgroups?

There is a wealth of options for building homeschool communities and peer groups, as well as cooperative learning. Home educators support each other in homeschool co-ops, which typically consist of a shared lesson for the group. Some co-ops even bring in outside teachers for instruction. For more information on these homeschool groups, visit THSC.org and select from the “Resources” drop-down menu option.

A Good Option: For parents concerned about their ability to teach the more advanced subjects; rural homeschoolers wanting more peer interaction; and those seeking to add more electives and variety to basic curriculum.





Traditional Homeschooling

A broad band in the middle of the spectrum is traditional homeschooling. This option varies greatly, but generally, we are referring to a method of daily instruction using curriculum.

Whether you follow a rigorous school schedule with set times and to-the-T curriculum, or spread learning out throughout the day with a basic curriculum to guide you, there is plenty of flexibility in educating your children at home. Learning options and activities include field trips, hands-on activities, libraries, other outside resources, community sports, dance, church and volunteering. The ability to mix and match these learning tools gives each traditional homeschool a degree of originality.

A Good Option: For families that enjoy structured days and parents that want the assurance of a comprehensive education via a reputable curriculum.

Unschooling

Unschooling is a fascinating concept that began in the '70s and has gained greater awareness and utility in this century.

The basic philosophy is that life is learning, so learning should always be happening—not driven by subjects and

schedules, rather by natural curiosity. Nonetheless, some unschooling homeschools have a set of rules that students must follow such as signing in and out of class or spending a certain number of hours on non-tech exploration.

Unschooling has been widely criticized and some opponents have gone as far as to say that it's not Christian. For a different perspective, as well as good resource to start an unschooling journey, read "Christian Unschooling: Growing Your Children in the Freedom of Christ," by Terri J. Brown and Elissa M. Wahl.

A Good Option: For families that can provide highly enriching environments, like international travel, and life-long learning adults who intuitively know how unschooling works.

Deschooling

Deschooling is not necessarily a home education method, but it is important to note because it is a useful technique for children who struggle to adapt to homeschooling.

Deschooling is like unschooling in that it allows children to learn at their own pace in a relaxed environment, but it differs because it is a transitional time while parents and children prepare to jump elsewhere on the spectrum of homeschooling.

When deschooling, some parents choose to forego schoolwork altogether in favor of trips to museums or concerts, arts and crafts, and adventures in nature. Search “Tips for Deschooling” at TheHomeschoolMom.com for 14 excellent tips.

A Good Option: For families who started homeschooling without much preparation. A deschooling transition buys time for parents to organize and for children to love to learn again.

Whichever homeschooling approach your family chooses, be sure to comply with applicable state laws. To find out more on Texas state requirements, visit THSC.org/gettingstarted. ■



Alisha Mattingly is a freelance writer and mother of two. She has tried many varieties of schooling for her children including public education, homeschooling and unschooling and has found that the best education a child can receive is from attentive, involved parents. In addition to her freelance work, Alisha currently works for the Kansas City Renaissance Festival

as the stage manager for the royal court and scenario. She enjoys her husband's jokes, traveling and painting.

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Homeschooling vs. Unschooling: *What's Your Style?*

By Christa Bedwin

Now that we have a better perspective on the breadth of the homeschooling spectrum, it is clear that traditional homeschooling and unschooling are not diametrically opposed, rather each is a personal choice. So which one fits your educational style?

Many homeschoolers follow the same subject material at the grade level their children would be studying in public school—usually via structured textbook, online courses, home-crafted curriculum, or a blend of all three. Then, there are those parents who let go of the reins and “unschool,” which entails educating according to the learner’s direction and interests.

Deciding on your approach to homeschooling is not a decision to be taken lightly, but neither is it something to set in stone. If you tried an approach that did not suit your family well, there’s no harm in trying another approach.

Here are a few things to take into account when weighing homeschooling against unschooling:

1. What’s your parenting style?

Many of the considerations around choosing a homeschooling style center on what our students are like: Are they


responsible enough to stick to their lessons? Will they feel too lonely? Do they need an interactive learning environment? Etc. However, the type of parent that you are is also essential in determining what model will work best for your family.

Homeschooling: Goal and achievement-oriented individuals who like to see measurable results will enjoy the schedule and structure of homeschool. Most homeschoolers—even the classic Type A personalities—also enjoy a healthy blend of experiential learning, such as field trips, as well as volunteering and extracurricular activities.

Unschooling: Parents who are more about the journey than the destination and who can roll flexibly with a changing plan might enjoy unschooling. These parents and children may have visions for the future that don’t involve competing on the same playing field as mainstream society. Unschoolers have the luxury to dig into long projects, spending weeks learning a piece of music, building or researching something, or diving into other projects with or without a measurable outcome at the end of the project.


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2. State Requirements:

The requirements for homeschooling in Texas are as follows:

- The instruction must be bona fide (i.e., not a sham).
- The curriculum must be in visual form (e.g. books, workbooks, on a television or computer monitor).
- The curriculum must include the five basic subjects of reading, spelling, grammar, mathematics and good citizenship.

Thankfully, these requirements leave a lot of room for interpretation and creativity!

Homeschooling: Most packaged curriculum will automatically cover these topics. Texas Home School Coalition members have access to the Lone Star Study for teaching good citizenship. Also, experiences like THSC Rangers Club (THSC.org/rangers) and Capitol Days (THSC.org/capitoldays) help bring citizenship studies to life.

Unschooling: Learners determine what they will study. However, to stay in compliance with state laws, parents need to make sure that each of the five basic subjects get a share of the learner's attention. It's likely that an unschooling student will use ample books, videos and online resources, and parents should document these visual sources the student is using to supplement life experiences.

3. Terms

What should your school day, week and year look like?

Homeschooling: Many families keep a regular school day schedule, Monday to Friday, following the academic year.

Unschooling: School is 24/7/365, and lifelong. But, to substantiate the state law requirement for "bona fide," it is recommended that you dedicate several hours per day to "unschooling" time.

4. College and Beyond

Neither homeschooling or unschooling prevents a student from going to a university or college. If the student has the drive and can demonstrate competence in writing, mathematics and other core areas, then quality institutions of higher learning will accept or even pursue them.

In 2003, THSC helped the Texas legislature pass House Bill 944, which requires state-supported institutions to accept homeschool graduates without discrimination and on

the same basis as their public school counterparts. (For more on college admissions, search "The Home School Graduate and College" at THSC.org.)

Homeschooling: Homeschooling arguably prepares a student better for success in college than unschooling (or public schooling). The exception is a college that is as unconventional as an unschooling high school experience. In a typical college setting, though, a student will most likely face standardized tests just to get in, followed by the hefty load of reading and writing within the context of regimented studies.

Unschooling: Successful unschooling will provide a learner with the knowledge, self-discipline and experience to succeed in college. However, it may be wise to plan a transition year to help unschooled students grow accustomed to testing, timed essay writing and regimented schedules. Auditing classes at the community college level provides good exposure to traditional education without the pressure of having to make the grade.

Both the homeschooled and unschooled have a great advantage in seeking employment right after high school if they have taken advantage of their homeschooling freedoms to develop skills and aptitudes for their chosen vocations.

Best of Both Worlds

I have compared and contrasted throughout this article, but for many families, the ideal education combines regimented curriculum of traditional homeschooling and curiosity-led experiential learning of unschooling.

A blended approach provides the security of knowing the child will have the skills to pursue a wide variety of future goals, while maintaining the flexibility for exciting, meaningful projects, travel, volunteering, sports, time with elders and other "real-life" experiences.

Home education provides a unique opportunity to craft learning to our children's styles and foster a love of education in them. If your kids love to learn, you have succeeded! ■



Christa Bedwin was raised on a ranch, got a city education, has traveled the world, and is determined to give her son the advantages of all of those through homeschooling. You can read more of her articles on topics from engineering to travel at ChristaBedwin.com.



An Eighth-Grade Unschooling Experiment

by Christa Bedwin

I am a school teacher by training, so when I set out to home-school my son for his junior high school years, I had a lot of lesson plans and curriculum lined up. I knew exactly what the school system thought he ought to accomplish in each of the core subjects, and since my early twenties, I had been saving my favorite textbooks. I had chemistry, earth science, mathematics, and French books ready to go.

I had a great plan, right?

Well, I suppose I should not have been surprised when it became clear the kid was not so interested in the books. He dutifully burned through the science books and asked intelligent questions, but he was clearly much more interested in watching science videos. Ack! Mom panic. Was this okay? Did it count as real school?

I suffered a bit of a crisis when I realized that I had not put him through pages and hours of written question-answering and unit quizzes. He simply got way ahead of me reading through the units, so I had to make some up. He did fine with those units, as he clearly understood the concepts, but he did not memorize facts and terms. Was this a failure?

To test him (and assuage my fears!), I assigned him the task of listing what he was learning in the videos. I was pleasantly shocked at how detailed his lists were!

My son could now discuss relatively complex science and he clearly enjoyed it. He wasn't just watching like a zombie. Rather, our conversations indicated that he had internalized and processed some high-level information. By any measure, that must mean he'd learned something, albeit not in the way I'd been taught to teach.

The next casualty was the math textbook, which he called "dull." One week, we did polynomial factoring before quickly moving to the next skill, and the next. Then, I woke up on Friday and realized my 13-year-old son just marched through problems that some of my 16-year-old public school students had struggled with.

It was at that exact point that I relaxed into what I had planned in the first place: not to force my son to spend his year at his desk. So, I stopped pushing. Sure, I quizzed him on the math now and then; and, yes, he was retaining the skills. He was just way ahead of the curve.

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In the time freed up by relaxing the lessons, he devoured more novels than I can count. Again, that was a very “unschooling” move, which was hard for me to allow at first. However, at the end of several months, I saw that his blog posts and spelling had clearly evolved and improved.

Here’s another example from a trip to Edinburgh, Scotland. After a few

weeks walking around the city, I sat him down on a rainy day at a museum and asked him to draw a sketch map based on what he’d learned. He did a credible job of mapping that ancient city from memory and with cartographic features he’d learned at the museum!

Homeschooling naturally morphed into an unschooling situation—one based on my son’s interests. Being a

Type A worrier, am I able to say definitively that he’s at or ahead of his grade level? My answer is yes. I know that he’s ahead of his peers, he’s engaged with his work and his skills have definitely improved from a year ago.

The next question is: What will ninth grade look like? ■



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R A Z I E M A H

The Big Questions: What is Your Educational Philosophy?

by Donna Schillinger, THSC Publications Manager

Beyond unschooling and traditional homeschooling, there are a number of prominent styles based on differing educational philosophies. (See the 14 styles briefly defined on the next page.) Determining which of these you most align with is helpful for narrowing down curriculum choices and other resources (like favorite websites and bloggers) that will best contribute to your homeschooling journey.

More fundamentally, it is important to recognize your personal educational philosophy so that your day-to-day choices align with your true intentions.

For example, if you believe that discussion significantly contributes to education, why would you rely primarily on worksheet-based curriculum? If you value experiential learning, do you have time built into your schedule and supporting materials included in your program to facilitate it?

Educational philosophy is something we all have, though we may not articulate it. Begin articulating your homeschool educational philosophy by taking the quiz, "What Kind of Homeschooler Are You?" at Eclectic-Homeschool.com. As you answer the questions, you will begin to see a pattern emerge—a self-awareness that is just as valuable as the quiz results you will receive.

Next, start with a blank page and write down your beliefs in rough form by completing sentences such as:

- I believe the purpose of education is...
- I believe education should prepare a child to...
- By homeschooling my children, I hope to...
- The most important things I want my child to take away from schooling are...
- If I had unlimited time and resources, I would teach my child...
- If I had unlimited time and resources, my educational style would be...

Now reflect on your actual teaching practices compared to your beliefs. Do they match up, or could your practices be better aligned?

A person's educational philosophy can change as the years roll by and as you gain more perspective by getting to know other homeschooling families with differing philosophies. Even if you began your journey with a clear sense of purpose and direction that still holds, it might be a good idea to ask the big questions occasionally so that you can be confident that you're homeschooling intentionally.

Homeschooling Styles Briefly Defined

An Internet search on “homeschooling” plus any of the terms below in bold will return a plethora of resources on the topic.

Charlotte Mason uses literature as the basis for the school curriculum.

Classical Education has three stages.

- Grammar (elementary) is characterized by learning basic skills and memorizing facts.
- Dialectic (junior high) is about understanding the logic behind facts.
- Rhetoric (high school) is the application of logic to real and hypotheticals, plus learning to create new ideas.

Delayed Academics teaches young children through functional activities like daily living and play. Then, when formal study is introduced, it is done within the context of unit studies.

Eclectic Education is just that—a unique and creative weaving of a number of approaches to suit the particular needs and interests of its practitioners.

Montessori Education affords children long, uninterrupted periods of child-led study on interrelated subjects. Parents play the role of observers and guides.

Project-Based Learning goes deep. Like unit studies, it’s topic based. Like unschooling, it’s based on the student’s interest; but this style places parents more in the role of learning mentor.

Reggio Emilia Approach assumes children are capable of constructing their own learning. Children use a “hundred languages” such as art, music, movement, etc., to express themselves. The order of instruction is child, parent then environment.

Technology-based Education is generally based on traditional methods. However, learning is delivered via virtual classes, online tutors, video, apps, websites and other formats.

Thomas Jefferson Education has three stages:

- Early childhood focuses on morality and relationships.
- Middle school is about developing a love of reading and participating in projects of interest to the student.



- The final phase uses the classics and mentors during long hours of study.

Traditional homeschools use textbooks, workbooks and other highly structured curriculum materials. Learning is evaluated with tests and grades, similarly to most public and private school classrooms.

Unit Study is cross-discipline study of a particular topic or theme. Professor Amalgam’s *Motley Curriculum Concotions* (p. 46) is brief example of a unit study.

Unschooling is unstructured, child-directed learning. (See “Homeschooling vs. Unschooling: What’s Your Style?” on p. 36)

Waldorf Education positions the teacher as nurturer and guide. Children learn concepts appropriate to their physical developmental stage:

- Moral principles in early childhood
- Emotional maturity through puberty
- Reasoning in adolescence.

Worldschooling, or travel-based education, is experiential learning where the student’s changing environment offers unique lessons in geography, history, language, culture, art, music, cuisine, economics, literature and more. ■

THE MAIN THING

A Family Tradition That Can Change the World

By Emily Towns



With four kids (and two dogs), Christmas with the Aults is never boring!

It began in the laundry room.

Michele-Lyn Ault used to dream of overseas mission work—living in a hut and changing the world. Instead, she found herself in Florida doing laundry for a large family and homeschooling four children. It was on one of those uneventful laundry days that a world-changing idea occurred to her.

As Michele-Lyn fished some loose change out of the bottom of the washer, she asked her husband if they might start saving the “laundry money” to put toward world missions.

The Aults were already passionate advocates for World Help, a Christian humanitarian organization. They had even traveled with the organization to places such as Guatemala and Rwanda on missions to spread physical help and spiritual hope. Now, Michele-Lyn was looking for a way to get her kids

involved and teach them the importance of helping others.

The Ault family began to put money into a red tin can they affectionately dubbed the “The Jesus Jar.”

“It’s not even a jar, but that’s what we call it!”

Michelle-Lyn laughs.

When December came, the family gathered around the World Help Christmas gifts catalog to choose which gifts they wanted to give to people in need. Would it be livestock for a family in Africa? Bibles for persecuted Christians? Humanitarian aid for refugees?

“We didn’t really give them a limit,” Michele-Lyn recalls. “We just said, ‘Go ahead and pick a gift—whatever God is leading you to.’ That first year we added up the gift amount and then we counted the money from the jar, and it ended up being almost the same amount!”

“It helps our kids focus on people other than themselves.”

The Jesus Jar as a Symbol of God's Gift

Every year since, the Ault children have made it a challenge to see how much money can be placed in the “Jesus Jar.” And every year, the amount nearly matches the price of the gifts they wish to send.

“It’s become this really fun Christmas tradition,” Michele-Lyn shares. “It helps our kids focus on people other than themselves.”

Mostly, though, this tradition has given the Ault children the chance to engage with what God is doing around the world. Several of the children have now traveled with Michele-Lyn to developing nations. As they’ve learned about people in other countries, each has become passionate about different causes and ways to help others.

“As homeschool parents and as Christian parents, one of the greatest things we can give our children is a Christian worldview,” she says. “We have been given so much here, and we have the choice to consume it all or give.”

Michele-Lyn says there is an ongoing conversation in her home about the perfect gift—that when God gave His son, He gave because He loved the world, and the world is so much bigger than our own small communities.

“God loved the world, and He gave,” she tells her children. “So because we love God, we love the world, and we give.” ■

Emily Towns is a staff writer at World Help. When she’s not telling stories, you can usually find her reading or planning her next big adventure with her husband. You can read more stories from World Help at worldhelp.net/blog.



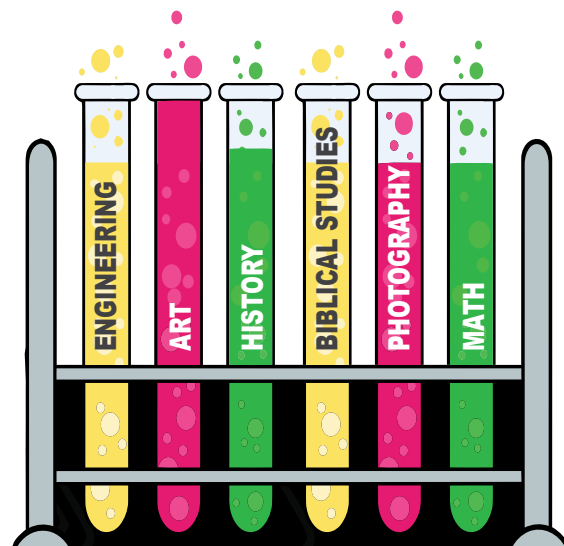
It all began with a handful of spare change from the laundry room.



The Ault's youngest daughter has grown up with “The Jesus Jar.”



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Building Your Own Temple

Every good scientist knows that to build something—even a square box—you need to use some mathematics. So today, my handy lab technicians, we need to put on our mathematical tool belts, because our project is to build a temple!

Important Terms to Know:

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Height	Metric System	Square Foot	Dimension	Proportion	Mock-up	Blueprint

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The specific instructions for our construction project can be found in the Bible, in the book of I Kings Chapter 6. Take a moment to read it now. ... Okay, ready?

Activity

1. On the Internet, research examples of Solomon's Temple models. Try a Google Images search.

2. Create a project summary: List ideas for creating your own model of Solomon's temple, supplies needed, steps to complete the project, and create a timeline of the length of the project. (Hint: your deadline should be no later than November 20, 2017.)

3. Now gather your planning and construction materials: pencil with eraser, ruler, calculator, markers, colored pencils, paints, etc., graph paper or sketch pad, craft supplies for your construction project, such as: craft sticks, glue, clay, play-dough, gold spray paint, a carving instrument.

4. We need to put those measurements into something we can work with in the 21st Century, like feet or meters. To convert cubits to meters, visit MathIsFun.com. Or, use this formula for converting cubits into feet:

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \# \text{ of cubits} & \times & 18 \div 12 \text{ inches} = \# \text{ of feet. For example:} \\ 15 \text{ cubits} & \times & 18 \div 12 = 22.5 \text{ feet.} \end{array}$$

Use your mathematical formulas to sketch a blueprint of the outside of the temple. Using graph paper helps to keep dimensions in proportion. You will need to create a new formula to convert meters or feet to one square on the graph paper. For example, you may want one square on the graph paper to represent 10 feet, or 10 meters. (Not sure how to sketch a building? Oh, me neither! After all, I'm a scientist! Fortunately, YouTube has several "How to Sketch a Building" tutorials.)

5. Use your blueprint to build a model—or mock-up—of the outside of Solomon's Temple from your choice of materials.

6. Take a picture of your completed project (you can be in the picture if you want!) and send it to Professor Amalgam at socialmedia@thsc.org. It should be a high-resolution image, meaning you must set your camera (or phone) on the best setting before taking the picture. If you will allow me, I would like to show all my readers your finished project.

Adaptations for Other-Aged Learners

Early Elementary

- Practice drawing simple shapes, like squares and rectangles, on graph paper. Sketch a picture of your own house on graph paper.
- Take a picture of your drawing and email it to Professor Amalgam at socialmedia@thsc.org.

Middle School

- Choose one aspect of the temple (door, cherubim, etc.), and according to its description in I Kings, calculate its dimensions using addition, subtraction, division and multiplication.
- Using clay or another material, make a mock-up of your chosen temple feature.
- Take a picture of your mock-up and email it to Professor Amalgam at socialmedia@thsc.org.

High School

- Study ratios in building models and create a mock-up of the temple to a specific ratio (such as 1:250).
- Try the project steps for Noah's Ark.
- Take a picture of your model and email it to Professor Amalgam at socialmedia@thsc.org. ■



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THSC Association, a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization, is dedicated to *Keeping Texas Families Free*. It is supported by membership fees and donations. THSC Association membership benefits include legal assistance, as well as a long list of other offerings and discounts.

The work of the THSC PAC (Political Action Committee)—endorsing and supporting pro-homeschooling candidates—is supported by donations that are not tax-deductible.

See **THSC.org** for more information.



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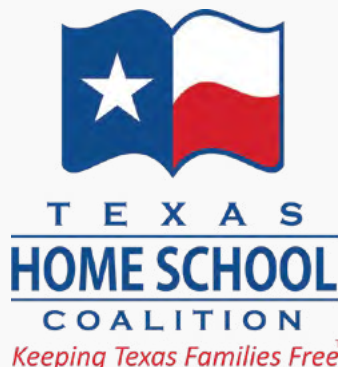
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Visit THSC.org or call 806.744.4441 for more information.

Why Teeth Matter

By Donna Schillinger

Right in the middle of bedtime reading one night, I heard a loud “Ugh!”

My son quickly grabbed a tissue and stuck it to his mouth.

“What’s wrong?” I inquired.

“My oof ell out,” he attempted.

“What?” I inquired again.

He stretched out his hand to reveal a pre-molar, while still holding the tissue to his bleeding gums.

“How much is this worth?” he asked, hoping it would be enough to buy two Cheesy Fiesta Potatoes and a crunchy beef taco at Taco Bell. (I miss the days when he believed in the Tooth Fairy.)

“Bubba,” I replied, “to me, that tooth couldn’t be more precious if it were gold.”

Later, I added the tooth to my collection of fallen baby teeth. Why do I keep these? Someday, someone is going to be cleaning out my personal effects and discover two stashes of baby teeth and really wonder about me. It’s kind of creepy. (But nowhere near as creepy as that Gerber baby food jar full of kidney stones I found behind the washcloths in Grandpa Anderson’s closet! *Shudder*)

A confession: I come dangerously close to worshipping my children. It’s not like they can do no wrong in my eyes. (Oh, they do wrong!) But, for as large a collection of their hair, teeth and brightly colored handprints I’ve amassed over the years, someone might stumble upon this stash and think I plan to clone my children when the science is ready!

I would ... if it weren’t so creepy.

I guess it’s natural to feel that way about a child you had a small part in helping God to create. A child you carried for nine months, bore in great pain and nursed—that’s my daughter. But what amazes me is that I feel the same way about my adopted African-American son.

I’m about the least racist person I know (isn’t everyone?), but I will confess that, as we awaited the arrival of our adopted child, I was a little worried. As the years go by and that helpless baby becomes a challenging toddler, then a child whose jokes aren’t yet funny, then a gangly preteen, then an obnoxious, or worse, rebellious teen and finally, a full-grown



black man ... would I love him as much as I love the child in whose face I see my own?

The process by which love grows in the heart of the adoptive parent is miraculous and mysterious. Just as with the overwhelming love of becoming a natural parent, you cannot begin to comprehend it until it happens to you.


Mind blown; world rocked; eyes opened ... to something very disturbing: how some in our society see a black child. I wasn’t ever ignorant to racism; it’s just that now it’s so much more personal.

Any decent American was grieved by what happened in Charlottesville last summer, but in homes where black children live, people were horrified. It breaks my heart to explain current events to my son and watch him process the harsh reality that people will hate him because he’s black, and there’s nothing he can do about it.

This is where we will remain until the hearts of *all* parents break as they teach children about the barbarism of racism.

We need to lose racism like a baby tooth. Haven’t we outgrown this? Aren’t we ready for a healthier, stronger tooth of mutual respect to replace its predecessor? That is one baby tooth, my friends, I would not keep. ■

Donna Schillinger serves as publications manager at Texas Home School Coalition.



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