

An Old-Fashioned Education Free Christian Homeschool Curriculum

Introduction

Hi, I'm Maggie, author and creator of An Old Fashioned Education Curriculum. It was created using free texts which are available on the Internet. Most of these books were published before 1923 which means they are now in the public domain. Since the original copyrights have expired these books may be used by anyone, any way they like. A few of the books are still under copyright. They are made available On-line by their copyright holders. Most of them allow you to download, print or copy their books free for personal use. Everything listed on this curriculum is free except for a few math and science books. These must be purchased separately. The reason for this is because I was unable to find accurate modern texts available for the upper grades of science and most grades of mathematics. Since these two subjects are vital for a quality education I recommend that homeschoolers go ahead and bite the bullet by budgeting for modern books in these two areas. It will more than pay off in the long run.

I created this curriculum by researching available texts and combining them together in grade levels to create appropriate progression from first grade through to graduating Seniors. I am confident that the recommended course of study provides an adequate, if not superior, education.

This curriculum is free to use and share with others. It may not be bought or sold and no money may be charged for sharing it, not even shipping and handling. If you send it to your sister in Peru, then you must pay for the shipping yourself. This is to ensure that no one profits from my work.

I wrote this curriculum so I could get a good handle on what to teach my own kids. They attended public school up until my youngest son was in 4th grade, his older brother in 7th grade and their cousin in 6th grade. I would have preferred to homeschool all 3 boys from the beginning, but I guess that wasn't what the Lord had planned for us.

I created An Old Fashioned Education Curriculum with my sons in mind so there are a few eccentricities that are right for our family, but may not be right for everyone else. We are Fundamental Christians so the curriculum is based on Fundamental Christian Values. It's designed to give the boys a solid foundation in their faith and thorough knowledge of the Bible. One of our goals is to raise good Christian men who are willing and able to work in God's Kingdom. We feel that providing an education from a Christian World View will further them on this path. If you aren't a Christian then this curriculum will give you some good ideas but it will need a great deal of tweaking to better suit your family's values.

Since I have sons I was careful to choose literature that would maintain their interest. This means that I couldn't include some of *my* favorite texts without having to fend off a riot. Books like *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little Women*, and *Rebecca of Sunny Brook Farm* just won't cut it in our classroom. I have included books of this nature as *Feminine Alternatives* when I

An Old-Fashioned Education Curriculum

thought it seemed appropriate. These are the books I would choose if I was teaching daughters instead of sons. Adjust the literature you choose to accommodate your own children. If you know they won't read a book then don't sweat it. Simply choose another one instead.

Overview

Each grade level includes a 40 week lesson plan that acts as a guide to keep students on track from one week to the next. I chose 40 weeks because this allows 12 weeks off during the course of a year, which we feel is plenty. We spread our time off throughout the year taking 1 week for Thanksgiving, 2 weeks for Christmas, 1 week for Easter, and a week every now and then to keep everyone fresh and focused. In the Summer we give the boys 6 weeks off to visit with their grandparents, go on family vacations, and generally just be kids. We found that supplying 40 weeks of school time keeps everyone active, keeps their minds sharp, and prevents idle hands from getting into too much mischief.

I have loaded the curriculum with plenty of hard work. Each grade level provides more than enough material to keep a kid busy, which for us, is pretty much the point. My boys are fast workers. We find that a large work load is best for our classroom. If you feel there is simply too much to get done then drop whatever is the most tedious or the least interesting. You can replace it with an alternative if you prefer, or just leave it out and not worry about it too much. Part of homeschooling is having faith that they genuinely are learning and that if you provide the materials, they will supply the desire to learn.

Another reason we have such a heavy work load is that all 3 boys have been diagnosed with ADHD. I used to think that ADHD was a bunch of hoey, but my boys have been kind enough to help me change my mind. It is a genuine disorder and there are many ways of handling it. Each of the boys is on medication to help them gain self-control. Even with medications though we do as much as we can to practice self-control on a daily basis because this is a life skill they all need to master. One of the ways we do this is to encourage the children to manage their own education to the extent that they are able.

Some families do this by allowing the children to choose subjects they are interested in and then providing them with resources to satisfy their natural curiosity. Sometimes this is referred to as *Child-Lead-Learning*. This may work for many families and I can see the benefits it would have. For our family though it just doesn't do the job. As a matter of fact it erupts into chaos faster than you can say "What would you like to learn today?" To keep the chaos down to a manageable level and to maintain peace among 3 rowdy boys we are very strict about homeschooling. They learn what I tell them to learn, when I tell them to learn it. I realize this may seem harsh to some, but for our circumstances it's the only way we actually make progress while keeping peace in the household. My guys prefer to know what they should be doing and when they should be doing it. The structure makes them secure, gives them a sense of accomplishment and keeps them on task, a challenge for any child with ADHD. For you this type of strict adherence to a curriculum may not be the best method. For my step-daughters, it would have been living hell and I would *not* have expected them to learn under those conditions. I would have adapted the program to better fit their ability to teach and lead themselves. Each child has their own needs and their own learning styles. It's up to you as the parent to discern the method that is best for your family. Just because a

method works for one person, doesn't mean it works for everyone. This is one area where homeschooling really rises to the occasion.

So, how does it work?

Well, you start by printing out the curriculum chart. It's 4 pages long and documents the books and activities used by each grade level. Take a look at the chart. Look at the grade level that you think your child should be in. If he or she is just beginning school then you'll start with first grade. If your child has been in public schools then look at the grade level 1-step below the grade your child now occupies in school. For instance, if your daughter is currently in 4th grade, then look over 3rd grade. Go to the book list on the website and browse through the books. Do they look like they are at her reading level? If so then choose 3rd grade. If she's more advanced then have a look at the 4th grade book list. Once again, browse through the books. Do they seem appropriate for her skill levels? If so, then choose 4th grade. If they are still below her skill level then move on to the 5th grade list. Do this for each child you will be teaching. Don't worry about choosing the perfect grade level. If you are off by a year, or even 2 or 3, then you will soon see that the books are too easy or too hard and you can change accordingly. There is no set rule about which age should be in which grade. There are generalizations we can make, but each child is different and one of the great things about homeschooling is that we can customize our program to each child's needs.

How old is old enough to start?

This is a very individual matter. Some children are ready at 5, some aren't ready until 7. There's no getting around it, not all children are ready to start school at the same time. This is one of the areas where our public school system fails. It's also an area where homeschooling excels. A child is ready to start school when he or she can sit still for a length of time and is displaying an interest in learning to read, or has already begun to read short words and sentences. Usually this happens between 4 and 6 but it can start earlier and later. You know your child best so use your best judgment in deciding when to begin. I personally believe that most 4-year-olds are not yet ready to embark on their formal education. I'm sure there are exceptions to this rule, but from my perspective 4-year-olds should be outside playing in the dirt instead of inside practicing their letters. Holding a pencil, sounding out words, learning to write, read and count, these all require a certain level of maturity. As parents we must be patient and allow our children to reach this level of maturity before we begin homeschooling. On the other hand, if you have a child who is just chomping at the bit to start school then it would be useless to hold them back. One again, this is a very individual matter and a decision that each family must make for themselves.

I'm coming out of a public school situation and I don't know what to do!

First off, relax. You know everything you need to know in order to teach your children. You potty trained them. You taught them their ABC's and how to count. You read to them, taught them to tie their shoes, work zippers and all the other things they learned before they entered Kindergarten. Homeschooling is just like that, but with books and paper added to the equation. You do not have to be an expert on everything your child(ren) will be learning. That's what the books are for. They give you a short cut to the knowledge of an expert. If you

An Old-Fashioned Education Curriculum

have the books, you can teach your children everything they need to know. Public school teacher's use books to make their job easier and you can too.

When I took my children out of public school they were ages 9, 11 and 12. They did not trust my ability to teach them. They thought that I didn't know as much as their teachers did and that they would wind up being stupid because their mom wasn't qualified to provide them with the education they deserved. As much as I reassured them, they didn't believe me. They were accustomed to relying on teachers to give them information instead of learning skills themselves, through their own effort. They needed to learn how to dig knowledge out of the books around them. I had done my best to teach the boys a love of books, but public schools taught them to rely on the teacher to spoon feed them predigested information instead of acquiring and digesting it for themselves. The first skill we needed to learn was to trust books and use them as tools to acquire knowledge.

Trusting that this skill would come with time, I started small. After developing a book list I printed them out and set up a schedule. On Mondays we'll read this book, on Tuesdays we'll read this book, on Wednesday's we'll practice this activity and on and on for the whole week. The boys didn't think that they were learning. When people would ask them what they were learning they didn't know how to answer. Usually they replied "Nothin'," and that was that. I kept the boys reading, writing questions and answers about what they read, filling out simple book reports, participating in group discussions and activities like drawing or labeling maps, and eventually something happened. It took about 6 months of homeschooling, but one day I realized that they were no longer questioning my techniques. They finally realized that books give us knowledge and to increase our knowledge, we read more books. Once they had accepted this fact of life everything else fell into place.

If you are coming out of a public school situation then I want to reassure you that what you teach the first year really doesn't matter. They will learn everything they need to know by the time they graduate. The main thing to learn the first year is how homeschooling works in your family. It will be different than it is for other families, but it will be exactly right for you.

Do I have to follow the curriculum exactly?

Heavens No! I don't follow it exactly and I don't expect anyone else to either. A curriculum is a guide. It gives you some ideas that work perfectly for you and some ideas that need adjustment. There will even be some books that you look at and say "Nope, this isn't right for our family." So you lay that book aside and find another one that will work better for your circumstances. If you have textbooks at home that you would rather use for certain subjects then go right ahead. You know what's best for your children and it's your job to weed out the wheat from the chaff. What may be wheat for me may be chaff for someone else. Follow as much of the curriculum as you are comfortable with and fill in the rest with materials that work best for you.

How am I supposed to print all this stuff out?

If you are going to teach your children with more than a few e-texts then you need a good printer. There's no getting around it; free books aren't much good if you can't turn them into a paper book. Some folks can read everything off of a computer screen, but most children perform better with paper books.

An Old-Fashioned Education Curriculum

Some programs allow you to print on only the even pages or only the odd pages. PDF and DjVu documents allow this. If you want to print on both sides of the page then print out the odd pages first. Then flip the pages over and print out the even pages on the other side of the paper. This can get a little tricky if your printer tends to spit pages out into a disorganized pile, but it can be done.

Some printers have something called a duplex. This means that they will print on both sides of the page. They are very handy, and if you can afford one I recommend owning one. It will save you time, money and effort.

Laser printers are generally cheaper per page than ink-jet printers. They also have better quality printing. They cost more initially, but save money over time. The cheapest laser printer I've found is from Lexmark.

Which brings me to the printer I own. After seeing all of the lovely public domain texts on the Internet, I decided that the best investment the first year, would be to buy a good laser printer. I knew I wanted a duplex because I have not done very well with two-sided printing using the "flip-method." Duplexes are available from almost every brand name, but most of them cost at least \$600. This of course, is laughable when you find yourself counting quarters to buy laundry detergent a few days before payday. I needed something a lot cheaper which brought me to Brother brand printers.

After a lot of research I chose a Brother HL-5170DN. The D stands for Duplex and the N stands for Network. Duplex means it will print on both sides of the paper and Network means I can hook it up to more than one computer at a time. It comes with 32 MB memory standard and can be upgraded to 160 MB. This much memory is important if you print a lot of graphics, but it's not especially pertinent to me. The printer wound up costing about \$250 from Amazon. After using it for a few weeks I was amazed at how well it worked. It was like going from the horse and buggy to a fully equipped minivan. If you plan on using public domain texts to educate your family you really owe it to yourself to buy a printer with duplexing capabilities. It just makes life so much easier.

What about binding all of these books?

First off, I always use paper that already has 3 holes punched down the side. It can be found at Walmart, Staples and Office Max. It costs a little more than regular paper but it saves a ton of time and energy.

My favorite way to bind books is to put them in an inexpensive folder with brads and pockets. They go on sale for 10¢ a piece in August and I buy about \$5 worth. They easily hold from 10 to 80 pages. The title of the book can be written on the cover in marker and Presto! Change-O! Your book is bound.

Another way is to use 3 brads to hold the book together. Then cover the spine and brads with duct tape. This keeps the brads from coming apart and allows you to write on the spine of the book so you can identify it when it's in the bookshelf. If you like, you can use card-weight paper as a cover. This is what I usually do because it protects the pages from coffee-cup

rings, chocolate smears and sticky fingers. Simply punch 3 holes down the sides of 2 sheets of heavy weight paper. Arrange them as the "bread" and the pages as the "filling" of your book sandwich. Place the brass fasteners (brads) in the holes, spread them open, and tape the spine. These are surprisingly durable.

For very long books, like 200 pages and more, I use inexpensive binders. I find 1-inch-wide binders the most useful. They are often on sale in August, sometimes for as little as 50¢ a piece. The title can be written on the spine to make them easy to identify.

Another option I've read about is to staple the pages together, with or without card stock covers, using a heavy-duty stapler. These are available at some hardware stores and office supply stores. After stapling the book be sure to tape the spine and the staples so they won't catch on anything or cut tiny fingers. Some mom's put the staples in with the flat part on the back and the sharp edges on the front. Fingers are more likely to rub against the back than the front so this tends to head any injuries off at the pass.

Okay, I have all these books, what do I do now?

Whew, that's a good question. I start by dividing the books into categories. Bible Study is my first category, followed by Arithmetic, Science, Language Arts, Literature, History and Social Studies. Some subjects must be taught every day. Others are better taught once or twice a week. At my house we do Bible Study, Arithmetic, Language Arts & History every day. Then we add Science twice a week, Social Studies twice a week, and discuss the current literature book once a week. If we find that we're falling behind in a subject then I schedule it more often until we're caught up.

At the beginning of the year I look through the books and note the number of lessons or page numbers in each one. Then I divide each number by 40 to determine how many pages or lessons we must work through every week to stay on schedule. This method allows us to get through all of our work by the end of the school year. If I didn't do this we'd miss a lot of the material through distraction and not staying on task.

What about Book Reports?

Well, to be honest, I don't think book reports really make a child understand a book any better than by simply reading it. Some folks would disagree with me on this point, but I seem to remember book reports being a tedious way to prove to my teacher that I really did read and understand the book. At our house we discuss the books every week, and sometimes every day. I know the children are actually reading the books, and I can help them digest anything that seems too difficult. I believe that the joy of reading is more vital to their future than their ability to write book reports.

What about Writing?

At our house we take an eclectic view of writing. Grammar books usually have writing assignments and we do all of those. I often have them write about subjects that pop up at home. For instance we did a nice long report about the dangers of an unbridled tongue after we read about it in the book of James. I have to admit their reports were amusing, but they were also filled with a deep understanding of the power of the tongue. When we do write

An Old-Fashioned Education Curriculum

papers we do a rough draft first and then a final copy. I help them edit their first draft and then they are responsible for perfect grammar, spelling and sentence structure in the final copy. We save these in a folder each year.

Some families give each child a black and white composition book and have them write a page in it each week. This as good a way as any and with my girls I would have done this in a heart beat. I tried it with my guys though and it was like pulling teeth, so we have lightened the writing load, although we are much more demanding about spelling and grammar that we would be if they kept a weekly journal.

Aren't some of these books too old to be useful?

The short answer is “No, they aren't.” The long answer is that I have personally chosen each book for a specific purpose. Children will learn about modern culture because they are immersed in it on a daily basis. Modern culture tends to give us a limited view of the world. By using older texts we give children a foundation in the way society used to be, and as a result they understand more clearly why society is in it's present status. Many of the social study books are almost history books because they were written nearly 100 years ago. Life in China or Japan is not the same today as it was then. So why allow children to read books that may give them a false impression? Well, it's up to the parent to explain that this is the way it used to be and that things are different now. Most of us learned woefully little about the history of other countries in school, while these older books allow children to understand the history of specific countries so that when they see things on the nightly news it's easier for them to grasp the changes that have taken place. In essence it gives them the story behind current events, so they have a fuller understanding of modern cultures all over the world.

Another benefit to older books is that they show children the way things were before being corrupted by modern worldly values. (Non-Christians may want to skip down to the next paragraph, I'm about to preach a bit.) A book on government written in 1865 will give a much different view point than one written in 2005. I don't know about you, but when I read the book from 1865 I think to myself “Oh, this is the way it's supposed to be. I can't believe our government has become so corrupt”. To balance things of this nature I have provided older books to supply an idea of the way “it's used to be” and modern texts to show how things have changed since then. Children are able to make the comparisons themselves, thus becoming equipped to make educated decisions about the world they will find themselves in as adults. They will recognize a wealth of options that their peers are unable to perceive. If they only read modern books then they would think that things have always been the way they are and would be unable to recognize their ability to change their future for the better.

Older books tend to assume Christianity and the Bible are a natural part of one's life. These subjects are mentioned frequently and used as the moral basis for daily behavior and decision making. Christian values including honesty, kindness, thrift, selflessness, generosity, patience, self-control and good manners, among many others, contributes to a child's character development. There are so many influences in modern society determined to rid our children of good character that I feel quite justified in my use of older books. It's my way of stacking the deck in God's favor, instead of the world's.

Yeah, but are they really learning enough?

My Land Yes! They are learning more than they would in a public school environment and they are learning plenty enough to perform well on their SAT's and PSAT's. If you're worried about whether or not your children are learning enough then look over their grade level and ask yourself if you know everything in that grade. My guess is that the answer will be no. I promise, your children will know more than you and be perfectly able to perform in society in the way we expect.

Part of homeschooling is working on faith. We must have faith that if we supply the information that the children will learn. We give them the materials, and they consume them until they're full. I liken it to breast feeding. When nursing a baby you don't know how much they get with each feeding. There's no handy way to measure the amount of milk they've eaten. Instead we must have faith that when the baby is hungry, he or she will eat. When full, he or she will stop. Homeschooling is like that. We don't measure every mouthful of information our children master, but we do see them grow and thrive and we trust that they are getting enough. If a child isn't growing, then we know they need more. If they are spitting up, then we know they've had enough and need to play outside for a while. Homeschooling is not a big deal. It is a normal extension of raising children. We want them to do well in life, so we share everything we know with them, and trust their natural curiosity to inspire them to drink of the cup of knowledge until they are full. Some things are rich and best consumed in small sips, other things are sweet or spicy and the child just keeps coming back for more and more until they are bloated with knowledge. Then it's time for a nice nap or a bike ride around the block to clear the mind. Children will learn. It's in their nature; God made them that way. We can trust that if we are keeping up our side of the bargain, supplying the materials, then they will naturally and logically take care of the rest.

Conclusion

My fondest hope is that this curriculum will be a spring board for one of your own creation. Some families will want to follow it exactly. Other families will enjoy customizing it to meet all of their own children's quirks and eccentricities. That is the point of homeschooling after all, to meet each child's needs individually instead of forcing them all to learn the same thing at the same pace. Even with our strict adherence to the curriculum, we still provide plenty of room for individualization. The children let us know when a text is working and when it isn't. If something is too hard then they agonize over it. If it's too easy then they zoom through it so fast that I see it's time to start looking for another text to replace the easy one. I really don't think there is a right or wrong way to go about it. Pay attention to each child's special needs. Give them the framework and then fill in as necessary. Before you know it you'll be an expert on homeschooling and sharing your wisdom with other mom's to help them along the way.