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How to Raise Lifelong Learners

Course Guidebook

Donna Baer
Author and Educator

THE GREAT COURSES®

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Donna Baer

Author and Educator

Donna Baer is an author and educator. She homeschooled her 10 children in every traditional subject, including AP classes, from prekindergarten through 12th grade—often using Great Courses. She also taught biology, geometry, and Spanish at Oldfields School in Maryland. She earned her bachelor's degree in Biology from Brown University.

Donna is the author of *Strong Happy Family: Unexpected Advice from an Ivy League Mom of Ten* and *The Bible's Feasts: The Secrets behind the World's Oldest Holidays*.

She also created the Classical Sunday School series, a comprehensive K–6 religion curriculum that employs the classical method of education.

A frequent speaker at education conventions, Donna has recorded a Teachable course on how to homeschool children from kindergarten through third grade. She also writes a blog that chronicles her passion for creating lifelong learners. All of her books and resources can be found at www.stronghappyfamily.org. ■

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How to Raise Lifelong Learners

The most sublime inheritance you can give your children is the gift of lifelong learning. Lifelong learners awake eager to discover what they'll encounter each day. They treat obstacles as challenging problems to be solved. They consider each new person they meet a wellspring of fresh knowledge. Kids who are becoming lifelong learners are curious and enthusiastic. They ask questions, search for answers, and focus on learning new skills. They're rarely bored, and they avoid many of the dangerous pitfalls of adolescence. In an age of blue screen bombardment and childhood malaise, how do you raise kids who swim against the current and find pleasure in discovery and study?

In this course, Donna Baer will draw open the curtain of her life to show you what she has been doing for more than 30 years to create a culture of curiosity in her home. She and her husband have raised 10 children who love to learn and who continue to teach themselves new things all the time. Donna homeschooled her children from preschool through 12th grade and also taught in traditional schools. Her insights will help parents no matter how they choose to educate their children.

Scope

The course begins with an exploration of teaching philosophies and an analysis of the pros and cons of homeschooling versus traditional schooling. As parents learn about the classical method, unschooling, the unit study approach, the Charlotte Mason method, and the traditional method, they'll be empowered to choose the method or hybrid approach that suits their family best.

Donna then discusses what parents can do in the very early years, 0–5, to set their kids on a course for lifelong learning. She discusses practical matters like sleep habits, healthy eating, and an orderly home with defined roles and good communication.

In the next two lessons, parents will learn how to give their kids the tools to teach themselves anything they'll eventually want to learn. Giving kids these tools isn't rocket science—any parent can do it. It does take patience and a willingness to proceed at a child's pace. Donna breaks down the process to make it simple. When kids acquire the tools to become autodidacts, the world becomes a learning smorgasbord where they can feast daily.

Next, the course tackles curiosity killers that can rob children of their wonder—things such as electronic media, fastidious neatness, and performance-oriented teaching. These warnings are followed by practical, proactive ways parents can fan the flames of curiosity in their homes. The course then goes on to explore learning that takes place away from the desk—ways kids can enjoy absorbing knowledge as they play and work throughout the day. Even household chores can become a way to further education!

Following this, the course explores why some kids struggle academically or show very little interest in learning. Several possible scenarios are explored, including learning disabilities, late bloomers, underachievers, and bullying. Each scenario includes specific, useful strategies for combating a reluctance to learn.

An entire lesson is devoted to encouraging teens in the lifelong-learner lifestyle. Parents often find that their approach to teaching and communicating has to be adjusted as their kids enter adolescence.

Scope

Donna offers insight from her first-hand experience in raising 10 teens and gives advice about how to keep them in love with learning when it's not always the "cool" thing to do.

Finally, Donna shares her personal journey of becoming a lifelong learner as she chose to fill in the gaps of her own education by learning alongside her kids. Her world became richer, and her kids had a model for lifelong learning.

If your children seem stuck in a rut or uninspired to explore, this course will help you reset. Whether you choose to challenge your kids to a life of passionate learning through homeschooling or through traditional schooling, this course will set you on a path of exploration with your children. At the end of the journey, you will have given your kids a great inheritance—but better than that, you will know and love them deeply.

Lesson 1

EXPLORING EDUCATION OPTIONS AT ANY AGE

This lesson looks at the most popular approaches for teaching at home and then weighs the pros and cons of homeschooling and traditional schooling. Being familiar with these models of education will help you decide which approach suits your family best. We'll see that the most common approach of all, however, is an eclectic blend of two or more of these methods.

The Classical Method

The classical method goes way back to ancient history. It was the educational approach used when all children were educated exclusively at home, and it typically emphasizes the great books of Western civilization. The study of this canon is usually organized chronologically.

Learning is broken into three stages, called the Trivium. The grammar stage (ages 5–10) focuses on absorbing and memorizing facts, or the "grammar" of each discipline. The dialectic stage (ages 10–12) emphasizes logical thought—connecting the dots and determining the whys behind all that grammar that's been memorized. The rhetoric stage (ages 13–18) continues systematic, rigorous studies and seeks to develop a clear, forceful, and persuasive use of language.

This method has a number of strengths. First, it has stood the test of time. Think of any great mind in the West born before the 20th century, and they were almost certainly trained according to the classical method. Second, because this approach emphasizes the connectedness of the various disciplines, classically trained students tend to have a broad education. They're literate in poetry and physics. And with the heavy emphasis on literature and writing, students tend to possess excellent vocabularies and writing skills.

But the method does have a few weaknesses. It relies on students memorizing—and regularly reviewing—vast amounts of information when they're young. For some kids, this is very easy. For others, it can be a challenge. Kids who struggle with challenging literature won't profit from the classical method until they're more proficient readers.

Unschooling

The next approach, unschooling, traces its roots to the education pioneer John Holt, who believed that children should be free to follow their interests and study what appeals to them. This method focuses on intuitive learning led by a child's interests and passions rather than a set curriculum. It encourages a systematic

teaching of the three Rs—reading, writing, and arithmetic—but after that, it doesn't advocate formal lessons or evaluations. Parents set healthy boundaries and are generally in the consultant or cheerleader role, not a teaching role.

The strengths of this approach begin with flexibility. With no fixed curriculum, the day's lesson can be dictated by the student's mood, the weather, or the budget. Students can touch on a topic briefly or camp there for months. If a family wants to travel, each location can be the child's new curriculum. Unschooling can be fruitful because when children really love what they're studying, they learn quickly and tend to remember what they've learned.

There are drawbacks as well. If your children are not yet curious lovers of learning, their delights might not direct them far. And if kids only pursue what calls out to them, some may eventually lack large swaths of learning. To be fair, every method of education will leave some gaps; there is no approach or curriculum that covers absolutely everything.

The Traditional Method

The traditional method is probably the polar opposite of unschooling. It tries to mimic a traditional classroom setting with workbooks, textbooks, class periods, lectures, and homework assignments. The teacher is the expert, and the students move through a set curriculum.

When a family transitions from traditional schooling to homeschooling, they often begin by using the traditional method—probably because it's familiar. Most parents don't need lots of lead time to wrap their minds around the method. There are tons of prepackaged curriculum options, and parents often feel assured that all the bases are being covered. It's a good choice for parents who think they'll homeschool for just a semester or two and then return their child to the classroom.

The downside to the traditional method is that it's one size fits all. A child's learning style, natural giftedness, and unique interests are not considered. Late bloomers or kids with processing delays are often left behind. Many kids find the consumable worksheets dull, and kids with lots of energy often strain under the yoke of all the seatwork. Further, a lot of traditional curriculum is written with the classroom in mind, so some of the exercises have to be retrofitted.

The Unit Study Approach

Using the unit study approach, children spend days or weeks focusing on a particular topic, incorporating various disciplines as they study. For example, if ancient Rome is your unit study, you might read books about the Caesars, memorize an Ovid passage, learn to manipulate Roman numerals, cook a recipe from ancient Rome, and build a model of the Colosseum. When that unit study is complete, you might move on to a study of frogs, where you watch nature videos of pond life, read *Frog and Toad Are Friends*, create watercolors of tadpoles, calculate the effect of temperature on a frog's reproductive rate, and write and perform a song about a frog.

The first strength of the unit study approach is its efficiency for a larger family. Several kids can be involved in the same project at once, each participating to the limits of their abilities. Next, the approach underscores the interconnectedness of learning as kids move from one part of a topic's web to another. When kids start connecting the dots in their world, they get excited. That excitement makes them even more eager to learn and make more connections. It's also just plain fun to have the whole family "live in Pompeii" or spend a whole week in the garden together.

As with the other methods, unit studies can leave a child with gaps in their education. You may never cover decimals or the laws of thermodynamics. Also note that this method does require a lot of parent involvement in the preparation and execution of lesson plans.

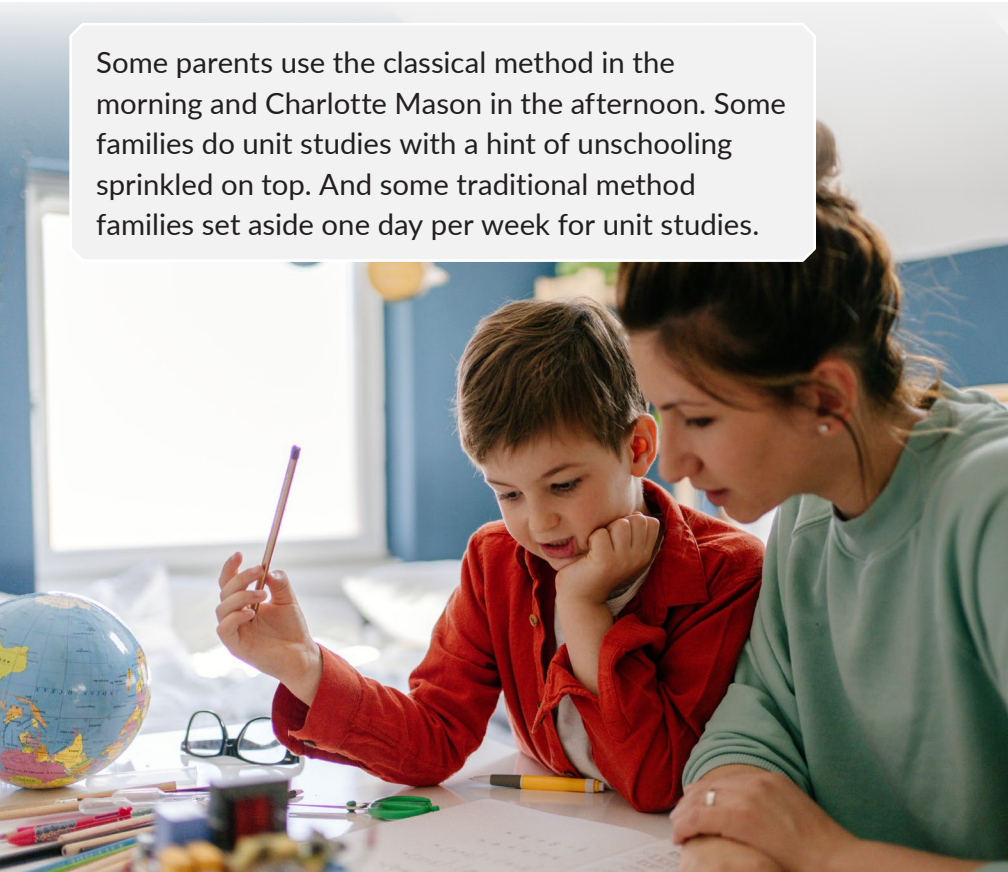
The Charlotte Mason Method

The Charlotte Mason method takes its name from the 19th-century British education pioneer. This approach involves short stints of desk work interspersed with lots of walks in nature, journaling, creating history portfolios, and narrating.

Center stage in a Charlotte Mason home is reading living books—books with heroes, life lessons, and morals. Like unschooling, this method is student-directed. It's active, outdoorsy, and reflective. Kids create beautiful records of their learning in their journals and portfolios. And parents are encouragers, not lecturers.

The disadvantages appear as children move to middle school and high school, as the approach doesn't cater to learning that doesn't begin with observation. (The Bohr model of the atom is just not going to lend itself to observation!) Some people believe this approach is overly fixated on a Victorian style of living and learning—but others love it for exactly that reason. It's also a distinctively Christian approach, so parents of other faith traditions might be put off by it .

Some parents use the classical method in the morning and Charlotte Mason in the afternoon. Some families do unit studies with a hint of unschooling sprinkled on top. And some traditional method families set aside one day per week for unit studies.



Benefits of Homeschooling

Now that you know the most common approaches to teaching at home, you can explore if you want to homeschool exclusively or just supplement your kids' traditional schooling with the help of these approaches.

Even if your kids attend traditional school, you're still homeschooling, in a sense. You help your kids with homework. You instill good habits in them. You read to them. And you challenge them.

The first benefit to exclusive homeschooling is control. When you homeschool, you take complete charge of your child's education. You can choose material that reflects your worldview or your goals for your child. And you don't have to settle for subpar curriculum or silly assignments.

You also control the schedule. If your family wants to take a road trip to historic sites in the middle of April, you have the liberty to do that. If you want to spend time with Grandma in her final days, you can adjust your lesson plans. If you sense your kids need a mental health day, you can toss the books and head for the beach.

Another pro is that you can tailor to your child's specific learning style. Is your child an auditory learner? A visual learner? A kinesthetic learner? Do they have a short attention span? Or do they love to sit for hours enthralled by a book? You can present information in a way that makes it easy for your child to receive.

The next benefit is efficiency. When you tutor one on one, there is very little wasted time. You don't need to issue busy work while the rest of the class catches up, and you don't have to wait until everyone is done using the restroom. Grade school will be complete by lunchtime each day, leaving your children with scads of time to explore their interests and to make friends.

Homeschooling exclusively can also help develop meaningful, rich relationships within your family. There's an intimacy that develops only when you spend time together. It's not that you can't develop those relationships without homeschooling—it's that homeschooling affords you the time to do it.

The final pro for homeschooling is avoiding negative peer influence at vulnerable ages. Some kids can be bullies or teach bad habits. Some children are very susceptible to this influence and really need their parents to rescue them when they're young. Homeschooling allows parents to monitor and control peer influences in their kids' lives.

Drawbacks to Homeschooling

Of course, homeschooling has its drawbacks. It can be time consuming. Depending on the teaching approach, it can involve extensive prep and execution time. And if homeschooling high school, you may have to spend a good deal of time learning alongside your child.

While homeschooling is almost always less expensive than private school tuition, the costs of supplies and books can add up. But you can homeschool on a budget using tools like the internet and a library card. Donna usually spends about $200 a year for each child.

If your kids just won't listen to you, then homeschooling will be a challenge. It can also be challenging, especially in the later years, if your kids are very competitive. Some kids are really motivated to study by the contest of a classroom. They want to memorize or revise to get the best score in their class. Competitive kids often don't strive for excellence unless they're being evaluated and ranked.

Finally, finding a social group may take some work if you homeschool. In a traditional classroom, there is a ready-made set of peers. Homeschoolers do find friends in the neighborhood, in their homeschool groups, or in their extracurricular activities, but it can take some intentional effort by the parents to make those relationships happen.

Reading

Andreola, *A Charlotte Mason Companion*.

Bauer, *The Well-Trained Mind*.

Bendt, *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*.

Holt, *How Children Learn*.

Questions

1. Which approach to education resonates with you most? Which method or combination of methods would serve your family best?
2. As you consider whether to homeschool or to supplement your child's traditional school, list your personal pros and cons for each option.

Lesson 2

PREREADING SETS THE TONE FOR LEARNING

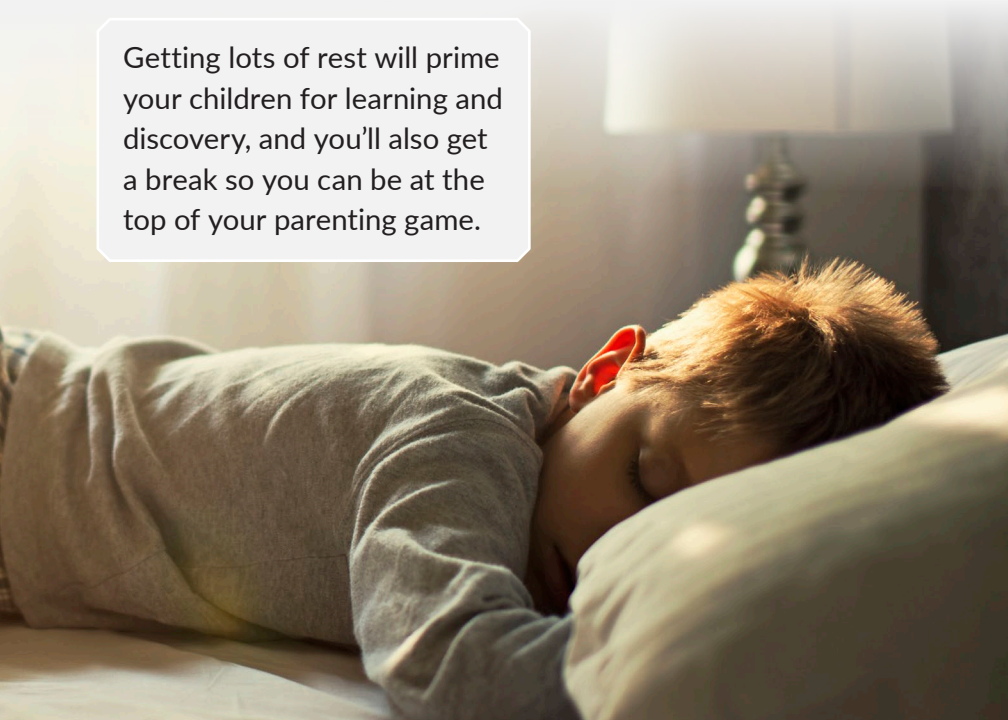
When you nurture a child's curiosity, they are rarely bored. They squabble infrequently with their siblings. As they get older, they are less likely to fall prey to the dangerous pitfalls of adolescence. And as adults, they have the tools to cope with setbacks like prolonged illness, market changes, or even worldwide pandemics. The best time to start your kids on the journey of learning and discovery is when they are very little. But if your kids are already older, don't despair: There are principles here that apply to kids of any age, and it's never too late to correct course.

Creating Rhythm and Routine

Your first assignment as the parent of a lifelong learner is to create a home that is safe and predictable. This is not to be confused with dull and boring. Little children thrive when they feel secure and know there is some rhythm or predictability in their lives. If children are often scared, their adrenaline-infused brains are not at ease to investigate and explore. If their little worlds feel disordered and unpredictable, they won't put their guards down long enough to become curious.

The first step in creating a safe and predictable world is instituting healthy sleep habits. When children are very little, everything is new to them. It's vital that they have long periods of rest at predictable intervals to process all the information they're taking in. For babies, creating naptime and bedtime routines involves changing, feeding, and burping around the same time each day. For toddlers, a routine might include putting on pajamas, brushing teeth, reading a story, and singing a song.

Getting lots of rest will prime your children for learning and discovery, and you'll also get a break so you can be at the top of your parenting game.



Usually by about 5 months, babies can be put on a predictable schedule, which includes a morning nap, an afternoon nap, and 10–12 hours of nighttime sleep. By 18 months, many babies switch to just an afternoon nap. Around age 4 or 5, preschoolers no longer sleep during their afternoon naps, but those hours of quiet downtime are still important.

The next step in creating a safe and predictable world is providing healthy meals at scheduled times. Young kids need lots of protein, complex carbs, and water—and they burn their fuel fast. They might want to devour a huge breakfast, another big midmorning breakfast, a moderate-sized lunch, a midafternoon snack, a light dinner, and sometimes a little snack right before bed. While this is taxing for the cook, it's important for all the learning that those small brains are attempting. When kids are hungry, they're grouchy and irritable, not patient and curious. And if they're fueled with sugar and chemicals, they don't carry sustained thought.

Along with the rhythm of naptimes and mealtimes, young children find great comfort in a predictable routine. Routines make the world less scary for children because they give kids a sense of order and control. Schedules don't have to be set in stone, and even small children enjoy a break in routine from time to time. But when children know there's a structure to the world, they feel safe within those walls. And safe kids love to explore.

Creating a Safe and Predictable Home

A vital part of creating safety and predictability in a child's world involves the child's relationship with their family. It goes without saying that a child should feel safe from abuse. But beyond that, for children to really thrive intellectually, they should have confidence in their parents' accessibility. Many parents work outside the home, so it's crucial that children know when they will see their parents—and that they can bank on that time. And they need to know that their parents will be there mentally for them when they're all together. Even little children are adroit at picking up when mom or dad are tuned out.

Children also feel safe in a home where they know their parents run the show. As much as they might try to assert their will or challenge authority, it's often to reassure themselves that the parents are still in control. Note that a home with parents in authority is different from an authoritarian home, where a parent's word is the law and children are not permitted to give any feedback. This kind of power structure is usually a recipe for disaster. A home with parents in authority is more like an organizational chart with parents as CEO: There's lots of communication and transparency, but at the end of the day, the names at the top of the chart make the final call.

Once kids know that parents are in charge, their little souls long for peace in the home. That peace comes from knowing that challenges are addressed rationally and restitution and reconciliation are the goals of conflict, for children and adults. If there is constant warring over petty grievances or icy hostility in the home, a child will not learn well. Even worse, a child will believe that they are at fault. They will spend energy on trying to make their parents stop fighting instead of discovering which of their toys will float. A peaceful home is the ideal environment for learning.

Creating a Verbal Home

Finally, as we uncover ways to set young children on the path to lifelong learning, we should stress the importance of a verbal home where parents make frequent eye contact with children.

Parents love to stare into their newborn's eyes, but as kids get older, it becomes easy to talk to them from across the room while folding laundry. It can become a habit to respond without looking up from our phones. It takes a bit of discipline, but taking a knee and making good eye contact while speaking to a young child is a habit that will pay dividends for years . When you make eye contact, your child knows you mean business. Whether it's "Go clean your room" or "Here's how to sing the ABCs" or "I love you," a child will listen when they see in your eyes that you're intentional. Words thrown at a child often don't stick.

The habit of looking children directly in the eye nurtures their identity. In acknowledging your personhood through eye contact, the child begins to identify their own.

You might have to train a child to make eye contact. If they won't look you directly in the eye, gently turn their chin to face you and remind them to look directly at you. You might make a little game out of it, chasing their eyes as they avert your gaze. Eventually, they'll get in the habit of looking directly at you—and at other people— when they converse. This makes communication with your child efficient. You'll also know right away if what you've said doesn't register with your child. This simple little habit will save you from the grief that often comes from misunderstandings. (And your kids will never try the old "You never told me to clean my room" gambit if you tell them to clean their room with eyes locked!)

It's also important to speak to your children in complete sentences, with good grammar. When babies are little, it's natural and appropriate for adults to coo and make sweets sounds for their infants. Babies love this and respond gleefully. Some parents, however, get in the bad habit of continuing baby talk as their children move into toddlerhood. Speak clearly to toddlers, and they will mimic you. Add vocabulary liberally. Kids discern meaning from context easily. If they ask you what a word means, answer patiently.

While children are little, continue to stretch their minds by introducing new words in increasingly complex sentences, all while making eye contact.

Lastly, remember that everything is brand new for your little ones. It's just very easy to allow amazing things to become mundane through familiarity. Try your best to climb into their heads, get behind their little eyes, and see the world from their point of view.

Reading

Baer, "Parenting Styles: A Straight Path through the Maze."

Clarkson, *Awaking Wonder*.

Sleep Foundation, "Children and Sleep."

Weissbluth, *Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child*.

Questions

1. What habits can you introduce to set your young child on a path to learning?
2. Which aspects of raising small children do you find most challenging? Can you devise any strategies to make your days easier?

Lesson 3

READING LETS CHILDREN TEACH THEMSELVES

If we really want our kids to be lifelong learners—learning for 80 or 100 years—they'll have to know how to teach themselves anything they want to know. Giving children the tools to teach themselves is the greatest gift you can give them.

Learning Styles

Identifying your child's unique learning style—the different ways that children prefer to receive information—will help you share these tools more effectively. Watch what makes them light up. Study what draws them in. Some kids prefer just one modality; others like to receive and process information in a combination of ways.

The Great Course *How We Learn* delves into how the mind acquires, processes, and stores new information. It's a fascinating topic for anyone who wants to raise a lifelong learner.

- **Visual learners** like to learn by observing things. They prefer drawings, photos, diagrams, and whiteboards. These kids can easily visualize information, and they often have a good sense of direction. They love illustrated books and colorful videos.
- **Auditory learners** prefer to learn with their ears. They listen carefully to explanations and love to memorize through music. They're often humming or singing to themselves as they play, and they generally have a good sense of rhythm. They love being read to. As they get older, they often enjoy podcasts.
- **Verbal learners** love using words, both in speech and writing. They're often early talkers, and they revel in expressing their feelings and ideas. If you tell them something, they process it by repeating it back to you. If you read them a story, they want to retell it.
- **Kinesthetic learners** receive information using their whole body. If you're teaching them their letters, they want to touch a wooden puzzle letter or draw it in the sand. They like to move while they're learning, often reciting while they're jumping up and down or skipping rope. If they must listen for a prolonged period, they prefer to be doing something with their hands, like knitting or playing with LEGO bricks. They're often coordinated and good at sports.

- **Logical or mathematical learners** glory in reasoning. They like to solve complex problems by employing strategies and scientific reasoning. Computer programming, math, and science are usually their favorite subjects. They enjoy puzzles and strategic games like chess.
- **Social learners** excel in a group setting. They love collaborating with others, brainstorming, and discussing ideas and concepts. Group projects are their strong suit. Social learners are good listeners who learn from their group members, and they usually have excellent interpersonal skills.
- **Solitary learners** prefer self-study. They like to be independent and work alone. They usually prefer quiet so they can focus and like to have a designated place for their work. They tend to be self-directed and have strong reading comprehension skills.

Life will not always cater to our kids' learning styles, so it's important that they eventually become comfortable learning in different ways. But when they're just beginning to acquire the tools for teaching themselves, it's helpful to present information in a fashion that will be readily absorbed. Later, you can work on strengthening their weaker modalities, but for now, make the most of your child's unique style.

Learning to Read

The tools for children to teach themselves are the three Rs—reading, writing, and arithmetic—plus the magic sauce: keeping a child enthused about learning. Taught incorrectly, the hard work involved in learning to read, write, and calculate can rob a child of curiosity. This lesson describes how to communicate the tool of reading in a way that keeps a child inspired to learn.

Learning to read is hard work for a little brain and can often be frustrating. Years before you begin to teach your children to read, you can entice them by reading to them. When small children connect the fact that those scribbles on a page unlock *The Secret Garden* or take them to Narnia or Sunnybrook Farm, they begin to want to figure out the code.

Since obtaining these tools is both essential and frustrating, it's important to teach in consistent, small doses. Try to spend a little time on reading, writing, and arithmetic every day, but never push to the point of frustration. Donna recommends no more than 15 minutes for each skill per day when children are young—say, up until fourth grade. You may think that's insufficient, but you'll soon realize that less is more. Your child will learn those skills, and those skills will be stronger for having been acquired gradually.

Teaching a child to read is not a mystery. There are a few simple steps. If you undertake them consistently and cheerfully, your child will learn to read—and eventually love to read.

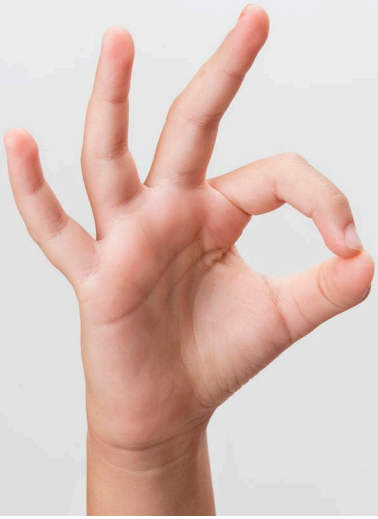
Letter Recognition and Phonics

The first step in learning to read is recognizing all 26 letters, both upper- and lowercase. A child should learn the letter's name and the sound it makes. Some children can master a letter a day; others might need a week or more on each letter. Take your time—it's not a race.

You can use flash cards, puzzle pieces, or just a pencil and paper to introduce the letters. Once a letter is mastered, review it regularly. Don't be disappointed if your child forgets a letter you thought was mastered. That happens. Just keep reviewing.

There is a debate in the reading pedagogy community about how to teach a child to read. One end of the spectrum is intensive phonics, where a child learns all the rules (and countless rule exceptions) to decoding. The other end of the spectrum is sight-reading, or look-say, where a child is repetitively exposed to a word and eventually learns to recognize it.

Neither extreme is ideal. With intensive phonics, a child can get bogged down in all the rules about the exceptions to the general rules. With sight-reading, on the other hand, a child's ability to decode an unfamiliar word is severely hampered. Sight-reading often produces seemingly proficient early readers whose skills peter out as they move beyond controlled-vocabulary readers.



After a child has finished a phonics curriculum, repeat the whole course from start to finish. You catch any gaps from the first time through, and it's a great confidence booster for a kid to breeze through something that used to be a challenge.

Instead, Donna prefers a strong phonics program that teaches kids the rules to decode most words but has them learn by sight the troublesome rule breakers. Choose a phonics instruction book and set aside no more than 15 minutes a day to go through a lesson—or part of a lesson. It may take a year or two or three to get through your phonics curriculum, so don't panic if your child gets stuck. Put the book away for a week and come back to it later.

Reading Practice

Next, your children should begin reading aloud to you every day for 15 minutes. This can be boring for the parent, but remember how new and challenging this is for your child. Finding a book with a good story, like a Margaret Wise Brown or an Eric Carle book, really helps. Gradually move on to more challenging books, like Beatrix Potter or Mercy Watson titles, until your child seems ready for chapter books. This may seem like a long time to you, but it helps to cement the phonics rules, learn the myriad exceptions to the rules, improve reading comprehension, and learn about literary inflection.

The last thing you need to do to cement reading skills and create a passion for reading is to lavish your child with books. Consider your library card your best friend, and give yourself permission to spend liberally on great children's literature. Include history, biography, science, science fiction, historical fiction, and poetry.

Don't insist that your children finish every book they pick up. Trust their intuition about which writers speak to them. To get a child into a book, you might read the first chapter aloud, using dialects to make the characters come alive. Once the child has been hooked, they usually devour the book. Some children like to reread books that have moved them. It's like hearing a song you like over and over again. Don't be in a rush to hurry them along to new books.

Reading

Blumenfeld, *Alpha-Phonics*.

Engelmann, Haddox, and Bruner, *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons*.

Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning."

Tobias, *The Way They Learn*.

Questions

1. What is your child's learning style? How will you teach to that style?
2. When is the ideal window for you to teach your child to read?

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Lesson 4

OPEN MORE **DOORS** WITH **WRITING** AND MATH

This lesson discusses the remaining tools that children need to teach themselves: writing and arithmetic. It also explores how to share the three tools in a way that keeps kids' curiosity flamed.

Writing

It's not enough for a curious human to merely absorb data. Mentally engaged people want to analyze and describe what they've learned. They want to have ownership of ideas by putting them into their own words. They want to be part of the great conversation by persuading others. They want to write.

Using these three steps—copying, narrating, and emulating—any child can become a good writer. They will also learn to think critically and form their own opinions of what they're reading. The process should take no more than 15 minutes a day when kids are young and less than 30 minutes a day when they're older. If your child is reluctant, find stories and essays that speak to their interests: computer programming or horses or music. Get the words flowing, and soon the ideas will take over.

Copying

The first step in teaching a child to write is teaching them to form the letters. You'll want lined paper with a dotted midline that's spaced appropriately for your child's grade or fine motor skill level. The lines are important for learning the relative size of letters. New writers prefer paper that doesn't let the tails of letters from one line interfere with the tops of the next line. As kids get older, the space for letters becomes more compact. Don't move up in grade-level spacing until your child is comfortable and accurate with the current scale.

Start with practicing one letter at a time. You can buy a manuscript workbook or just practice writing the letter you're currently working on in phonics. Begin by having your child trace over a copy of the letter. Then have them draw over a letter printed with dotted lines. Finally, have them write the letters on their own.

Once letters can be named and drawn with relative consistency, move on to writing words, paying attention to the proper spacing between them. If you're not using a workbook, you can have your child practice writing sight words or words that employ the phonics rules you're currently teaching. When words are mastered, move on to copying sentences and then paragraphs. You can use memory work you're attempting, famous quotes, or passages from great literature.

Narrating

Even before children can competently inscribe words, they can begin the first step of writing: organizing their thoughts. An enjoyable way to do this is to begin the habit of narration. After you read a story to your child, have them tell the story back to you. Many kids want to do this without being asked. Others have to be coaxed a bit. Begin with short tales before moving to longer stories and eventually chapters of books. Many young narrators like to dictate their versions to be transcribed by mom or dad.

Once children can write letters and words without frustration, they can begin retelling stories on paper themselves. You can introduce a formal grammar program at some point, but most kids will derive the rules of grammar through reading and listening to great books. The same goes with spelling: When children regularly encounter a printed word in books, they tend to learn its spelling by osmosis.

Don't limit your child's narration to works of fiction. Try science articles, biographies, car repair manuals, or recipes. All of these develop memory, sequential thought, orderly thinking, vocabulary, and syntax.

Emulating

After children can retell and write down information they've heard, the next step is to have them emulate the content and style of excellently written arguments. Benjamin Franklin taught himself to write this way. He'd read an essay by a writer he admired, taking notes. Next, he'd put the notes aside for a few days. Then, he'd try to replicate the essay just from the notes. Finally, he'd compare his essay to the original and make corrections.

Most kids and teenagers find the process of emulation challenging at first. Start with short, easy essays and build from there. Before long, your children will be echoing the voices of great writers in their own essays. And your child will eventually find their own literary voice, filled with the cadences, inflections, and lilts of the brilliant writers they've emulated.

Arithmetic

The last tool in our autodidact toolbox is arithmetic. Some educators think that a strong math competency is important only for STEM-inclined students, but much of the world's story is told in numbers. We deal in probability and statistics every time we evaluate a risk, and accounting numeracy drives our understanding of personal finance and macroeconomics. Teasing out facts from statistics reported in the news requires our being numerate.

Further, if your kids don't have basic mathematical skills, they will be shut out from vast disciplines of learning. Their worlds will narrow, and they'll be cheated of the joy of delving into quantum mechanics or putting together a great real estate deal. Not every parent can teach their children calculus, but every parent can offer their children the tools to become mathematically competent.

Counting

First, start by having your child learn to count out loud to 100 and to physically count 20 objects. Most kids enjoy figuring out the pattern of numbers and learn to count easily. You can count stairs each time you ascend or count how long it takes for the toaster to pop. As you play hide and seek, you can extend the hiding time to 100. Count the Cheerios before you pour on the milk, or tally piles of beads. Incorporate numbers and counting into activities your children enjoy, and they'll complete this step effortlessly.

Next, learn to count backward from 20. This step is often skipped, but it's very important when children begin subtraction. Just recite with them over and over while they're washing their hands or brushing their teeth. They can count down with the microwave timer or attempt a stunt like standing on one foot while counting backward from 20.

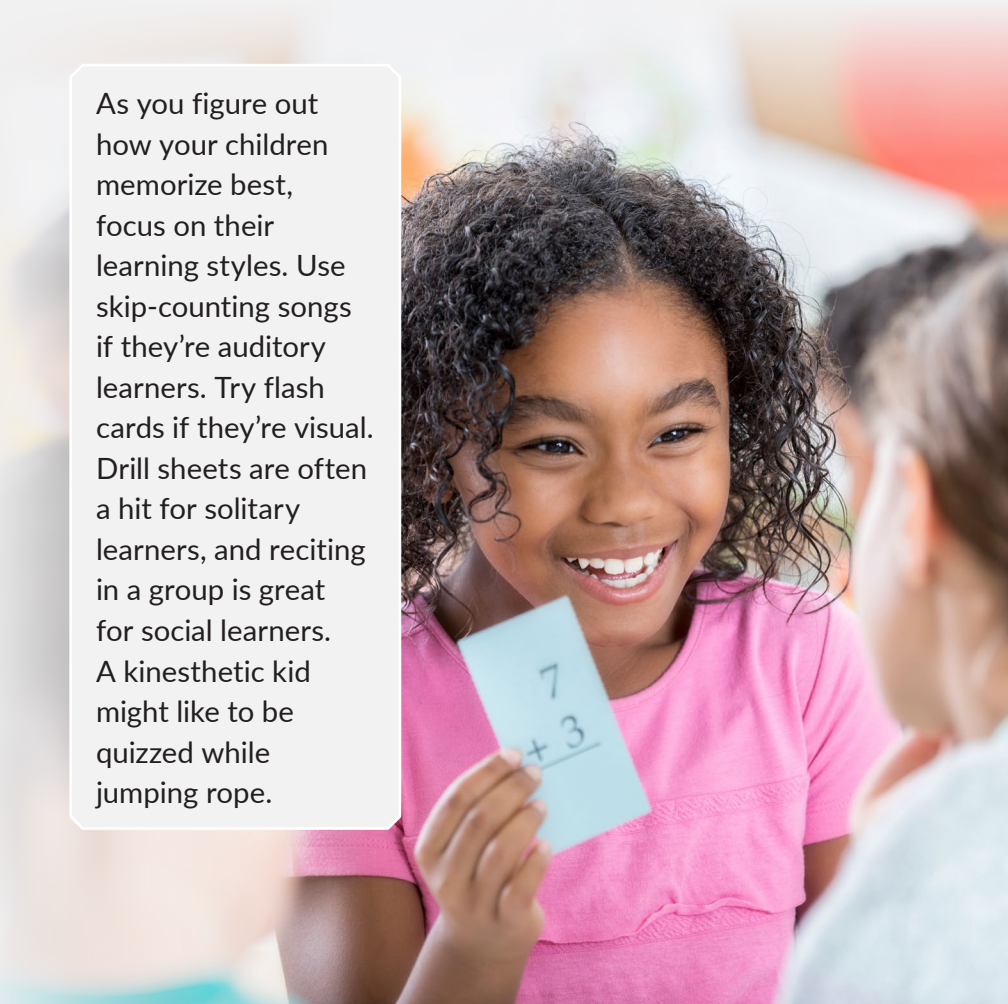
Drawing Numbers

Next, children should learn to draw the numerals 0–9. It's important to spend plenty of time on this step: Reversing numbers will lead to incorrect arithmetic answers, so kids need to be able to draw their numerals confidently. Use the same method described for teaching your child to write letters.

Memorize Math Facts

Finally, memorize the math facts. Start with addition, adding 0 to each number. Then move on to adding 1 to each number. You can use flash cards, drill sheets, or silly songs. Or you can illustrate addition with piles of coins or beans. Some kids love to be timed as they recite their math facts and glory in breaking their old records. Other kids quake under the pressure of a timer. Initially, focus on accuracy; speed will follow naturally.

As you figure out how your children memorize best, focus on their learning styles. Use skip-counting songs if they're auditory learners. Try flash cards if they're visual. Drill sheets are often a hit for solitary learners, and reciting in a group is great for social learners. A kinesthetic kid might like to be quizzed while jumping rope.



Once a child has mastered the sums to 20, move on to subtraction. Some kids immediately recognize that subtraction is the inverse of addition and can figure out their differences by reasoning backward from addition. Other kids don't get that at all and have to memorize the subtraction tables separately. That's OK. Start with subtracting 0. Move to subtracting 1, and so on.

Next comes multiplication. When multiplication is mastered, move on to division. Again, some kids understand that division is the inverse of multiplication and can reason division by working multiplication backward; other kids just need to memorize the division tables fresh. The process then continues with squares and their inverses, square roots.

Beyond the Basics

Place value (the ones, tens, and hundreds columns) is an abstract concept that should not be emphasized in kindergarten through fourth grade. In fourth, fifth, or sixth grade, your children will begin thinking more abstractly, and the place value construct will make good sense to them then. If you push the idea of place value early, you might frustrate your children. They'll conclude they're no good at math, and that might hinder their learning the arithmetic facts.

If your children have memorized all the math facts before it's time for middle school and high school math, they might enjoy the Great Course *Secrets of Mental Math*.

Learning to draw numerals, count to 1,000, recite all the arithmetic facts, and understand place value is all your child needs to do before junior high to excel in upper-level math. If your child can reflexively recite the math facts without pausing or finger counting at age 11 or 12, they are poised to become mathematically fluent. Using any respectable math curriculum, a child can master decimals, fractions, negative numbers, order of operations, and mathematical properties in junior high. After that, they'll be prepared for algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus—not to mention chemistry, statistics, and physics.

The Magic Sauce

With these tools of reading, writing, and arithmetic, children are poised to eventually learn anything their hearts desire. But having these three tools won't help a child whose heart desires nothing. If you're not careful, you can impart the three Rs in a rigid, demanding way that steals your kids' joy and quashes their intellectual curiosity.

Here are a few things to remember.

- This is not a race. Your child is not competing with anyone or learning to impress Grandma, your nosey neighbor, or the moms at the PTA.
- Children often hit learning plateaus. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your children is to back off for a while and let them digest what they've eaten.
- Some kids are late bloomers. Not every child is ready to read at age 6 or recite times tables at age 8. This doesn't mean the child is dull; it means that their brain is working on other things at the moment.
- Less is more. Fifteen happy minutes a day will yield more than 60 stressful minutes. Keep it light and sweet, especially if you're supplementing a traditional school day.
- Reading great literature aloud will remind your children of why they are learning to read. It will motivate them to stick to the chore when it's challenging.
- There is a lot of learning that will go on each day away from the desk. Imparting the learning tools should be a small fraction of your child's learning and exploration each day.

Keeping all this in mind will empower you to give your kids the tools for learning while keeping their hearts burning with interest.

Reading

Bogart, *The Brave Learner*.

Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*.

Mackenzie, *Teaching from Rest*.

Questions

1. What is your child's favorite way to memorize things like the arithmetic facts?
2. Are there any changes you can implement to make learning less stressful for your child?

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Lesson 5

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF CURIOSITY

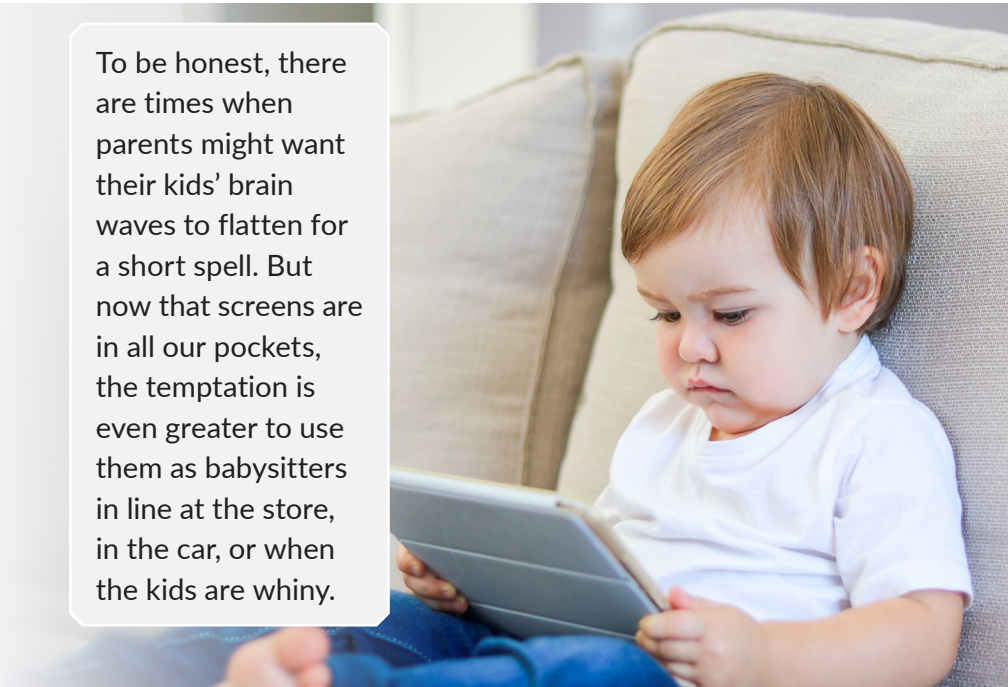
Children are born with a natural curiosity about the world, but that curiosity can be quashed if we're not careful to nurture it. This lesson discusses ways to foster a culture of curiosity in your home, including limiting curiosity killers, arranging your home for learning, asking thought-provoking questions, and modeling curiosity to children.

Electronics

Curiosity killers are those things that can defraud our children of their innate wonder. The first item on the list is electronic media. Screens can be addicting for mature adults, but children are practically helpless in resisting the allure of a cell phone, a monitor, or a television. This is not a Luddite screed against technology; it's a reminder that parents must carefully monitor the time their children spend in front of screens and the content they absorb if we want them to have a hunger for learning.

Staring at a screen can be a very passive activity. At times, brain waves flatten, eyes glaze over, and creative thought ceases. This doesn't always happen when kids are in front of screens, but if screen time isn't doled out wisely, a child might begin to grow dull. Studies suggest that children who spend more than two hours a day on screen-time activities scored lower on language and thinking tests, and some children with more than seven hours a day of screen time experienced thinning of the brain's cortex—the area of the brain related to critical thinking and reasoning.

To be honest, there are times when parents might want their kids' brain waves to flatten for a short spell. But now that screens are in all our pockets, the temptation is even greater to use them as babysitters in line at the store, in the car, or when the kids are whiny.



Even without scientific studies, most parents recognize the effects of a screen session that goes too long: malaise, grouchiness, irritability, argumentativeness. Not the recipe for learning a new cello piece or testing the pH of everything in the refrigerator. It goes against the grain to limit a child's technology use nowadays, but kids really don't have the self-regulatory ability to resist the siren song of screens. Young children really depend on their parents to make the regulatory decisions for them.

Fastidious Neatness

The next curiosity killer is fastidious neatness. If your home is going to be a laboratory of discovery and a studio of creativity, it's not going to make it onto the cover of *House Beautiful*. Kids will make messes. Coffee tables will host LEGO cities. Kitchen counters will be splattered over and over again with vinegar and baking soda volcanoes. Books will be strewn everywhere. If you are fixated on living in a Pinterest board, your kids will not feel free to follow their muses. This doesn't mean that your home should be squalid. But if you want to keep a child's curiosity alive, you have to let go of perfectionism.

Performance-Based Teaching

Last on the list of toxins is performance-based teaching. This is teaching that focuses on ticking off boxes and learning how to take tests well. Sadly, it's the style of education many of us were raised on. Many schools are focused on evaluations, and bright kids learn how to play the game: Memorize the list, recite the teacher's favorite tropes, and throw a few buzzwords into your free response. While this kind of shortcut-filled, performance-based education will produce good grades, it won't produce an inquisitive soul or a lover of learning.

Even homeschoolers can fall victim to this kind of misguided teaching. Many homeschool parents are so eager to prove something to their disapproving mother-in-law or to impress their neighbor that they turn their children into little performing monkeys to justify their choice. For parents who are in the habit of comparing their kids with other kids, this is highly damaging. The prize you win in such a contest is a people-pleasing kid who despises learning for its own sake.

Arranging Your Home for Learning

What are some positive ways you can create an environment that fosters learning? First, you can arrange and provision your home for learning. Whether you live in a tiny apartment or a sprawling mansion, it's good to define the purpose of each space and then design its form.

For example, you might define the kitchen as a place for cooking, eating, science experiments, and art projects. The kids' bedrooms are only for sleeping, dressing, and reading. The living room is for reading, conversing, and playing board games. The playroom is for toys, and the family room is for media. All this means that there will be no toys in bedrooms, no dishes in the living room, and no TV in the playroom. This helps with housekeeping, but it also helps you design functional spaces for the activities each room will host.

If you want your kids to create art, create a space for art. Find a sturdy, washable table with comfortable, appropriately sized chairs—your kitchen table would work just fine. Near it, stock a closet or a dresser full of paints, paper, pens, markers, glue, scissors, clay, and more. Keep a broom, dustpan, and garbage bin nearby. If space permits, have the kids clean up the art table just once a day. If you clean up after every little drawing or sculpture, kids don't tend to return to the art table throughout the day. The art table will be a constant allure and an ever-present antidote for boredom.

If you want your kids to play music, reserve a corner for music. Set up some shelves or cubbies for the kids to store their instruments and books. If you're able, hang instruments on the wall or in stands so that they are within easy reach. And if you want your child to love reading, put in bookshelves. A shelf of great fiction will call out to your child when they're bored.

A lot of what children will want to observe while exploring science will happen outdoors, so find a way to make their outdoor gear readily accessible. If kids need to hunt for 20 minutes to find their mittens or rain boots, they're less likely to venture outdoors to observe and collect. Hang hooks at kid-level, buy mittens in bulk, and designate a place to store outdoor gear.

The experiment step of the scientific method is usually best accomplished on the kitchen counter. Again, messes will happen. If you can spare a shelf in your kitchen cabinets, designate it for experiment supplies. Stock up with baking soda, vinegar, litmus paper, mason jars, pipettes, thermometers, cotton balls, copper wire, corks, and magnifying glasses. Accessible supplies will keep your child in the habit of experimenting.

Do not make your kids write a lab report every time they investigate what intrigues them—you'll kill their love of science. When they're in high school, they can learn to write a proper lab report. Before that, just ask them lots of questions about what they did and why.

Asking Thought-Provoking Questions

Another way to build a culture of curiosity in your home is to ask thought-provoking questions. First, separate in your mind the time for drilling memory work and the time for asking thought-provoking questions. There is a time to drill memory work—and it should be fun—but it shouldn't be all day long.

Here are some thought-provoking questions you might ask:

- Why do you think both lemon juice and vinegar turned this litmus paper red?
- Why do you think all the feathers in your collection have these hollow shafts?
- Why do you suppose these seeds get stuck to our clothes so easily?

Questions like these call a child to reflect and hypothesize. Try to avoid instantly dismissing their crazy theories. Walk your children through their theories and see if they can discredit them on their own. After they've thought through the question, if you supply an answer, they'll be prepared to evaluate it thoughtfully. If they conclude that you're correct, they'll own the answer because you've helped them reason their way to it—it won't be just another data point they've memorized.

As kids get older, you can use the Socratic method, layering a series of questions that lead from an initial premise to a logical conclusion. Your children will be trained to think syllogistically if you ask lots of thought-provoking questions about their observations when they're little. And the beauty of this kind of questioning is that it involves you in a dialogue of discovery.

Modeling Curiosity

Finally, modeling curiosity can help you create a culture of learning in your home. Children watch what we're doing. They are quick to copy all our bad habits, but they are just as quick to copy our virtuous behavior. Children who smile kindly and speak respectfully have learned to do that through watching their parents.

If you would like your children to become lifelong learners, model that to them. Let them hear you ponder. Let them watch you google. Let them see you with your nose in a book. Express awe. Give voice to wonder. Let your child know that you're not done learning—that there are still mysteries you want to solve. There are writers you want to discover. And one day, you're going to understand string theory. If you do nothing else for your children but model curiosity, you will have set them on their quest to become lifelong learners.

Reading

Behr and Rydzewski, *When You Wonder, You're Learning*.

Hall, *Awesome Kitchen Science Experiments for Kids*.

Kardaras, *Glow Kids*.

Questions

1. What is the ideal amount of screen time for your child? How will you go about setting limits?
2. What are some small changes to the organization of your home that would facilitate your child's exploration?

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Lesson 6

LEARNING THAT BUILDS CHARACTER

When we think about educating our grade school kids, it's easy to become fixated on learning that occurs while sitting at a desk, pencil in hand. There is a time and a place for this mode of learning, but the vast majority of what our kids absorb during childhood takes place away from a desk. In raising lifelong learners, we want to encourage our kids to make the most of their nonacademic time. This lesson looks at what we can do to channel their free time toward exploration and knowledge.

Stimulating Young Brains

When kids are babies, they love having plenty to see, hear, and touch. (They'll also try to taste anything you give them, so be careful!) Play beautiful music, provide a variety of toys, and hang engaging posters on the wall. Give them lots of safe, colorful objects to grab and shake. Their little brains are sponges, eager to soak in new sights and sounds. Note that you should give them very little to see, hear, or touch during naptime or bedtime; babies can become overstimulated, and they need downtime to process all they've taken in.

As babies move to toddlerhood, they become fascinated with sorting, discriminating, and predicting outcomes. Give them plenty of tactile toys and wooden puzzles to exercise those parts of their brains. Shape-sorting toys, simple matching games, and basic wooden puzzles are among the greatest hits at this age. Many public libraries lend toys, so you can borrow a toy or puzzle for a couple of weeks and then replace it with a new library loan. You might make a similar arrangement with friends who have kids the same ages as yours.

Learning away from the desk is primarily where your children will develop their emotional intelligence—attributes like self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Learning through Stories

As kids become verbal, their worlds explode with ideas. And when words and sounds become associated with ideas, children love to hear those ideas as stories. Books take them away from their nursery and safely deposit them in Arabia or Narnia or the Wild West. They meet strange and unusual characters, like Pinocchio and Frodo.

Great literature is a wonderful way to introduce your children to noble role models. With books, kids can learn character traits from brave leaders, persistent scientists, and intrepid explorers. Encountering strong characters in the formative years really molds a child's personality.

Verbal kids still learn a great deal from tactile toys, especially building toys. LEGO DUPLO, building blocks, or Lincoln Logs are all great toys that develop creativity and logic.

Once kids' heads are full of stories, they're eager to act those stories out in imaginative play. Sometimes kids with older siblings stop imaginative play because the older kids tease them, but you should try your best to let them imagine for as long as they can. As they create these stories, they're play-acting to make sense of the world. They're developing vocabulary and syntax. They're testing their theories about how the world works. Having costumes and props on hand facilitates their grand dramas. Through make-believe, they can try on different roles and begin to formulate an ethic.

Memorizing

Another brain-stretching activity that takes place away from the desk is memorizing great literature. Committing poetry and prose to memory isn't just filling your child's mind with facts; when they memorize great literature and incorporate it permanently into their developing brains, they calibrate their default settings. Their brains become attuned to flowing syntax, elegant vocabulary, and winsome ideas.

Teaching a child to memorize is as simple as repeating a line a dozen times. Encourage your child to join in with you. Leave a word or two out and see if they can fill it in. Then leave more words out. Vary your repetition by reciting while standing only on your right foot, and then switch to your left. Recite in different voices, like a cowboy or a robot or an elf. Add hand motions. The next day, review what you've memorized and add the next line. In short order, your children's speech will begin to imitate the vocabulary and syntax that they've committed to memory.

Most little kids don't consider memory work a chore, especially if you approach it playfully. And this is a great way to share your values with your children. Excerpts from the sacred texts of your religious tradition, selections from books that have molded you, speeches that have inspired you, poems that give voice to your most complex emotions—whatever things are cherished in your family can become your children's lodestar when they commit them to memory.

Exploring Nature

Nothing instills a desire to learn more than exploring nature. Stroll through the woods or a park to let your child look under rocks, dig dirt, and begin cataloguing the world. Ask questions about what they notice. Which way is the earthworm moving? Which bird just sang that song? How many different kinds of tree seeds can we find?

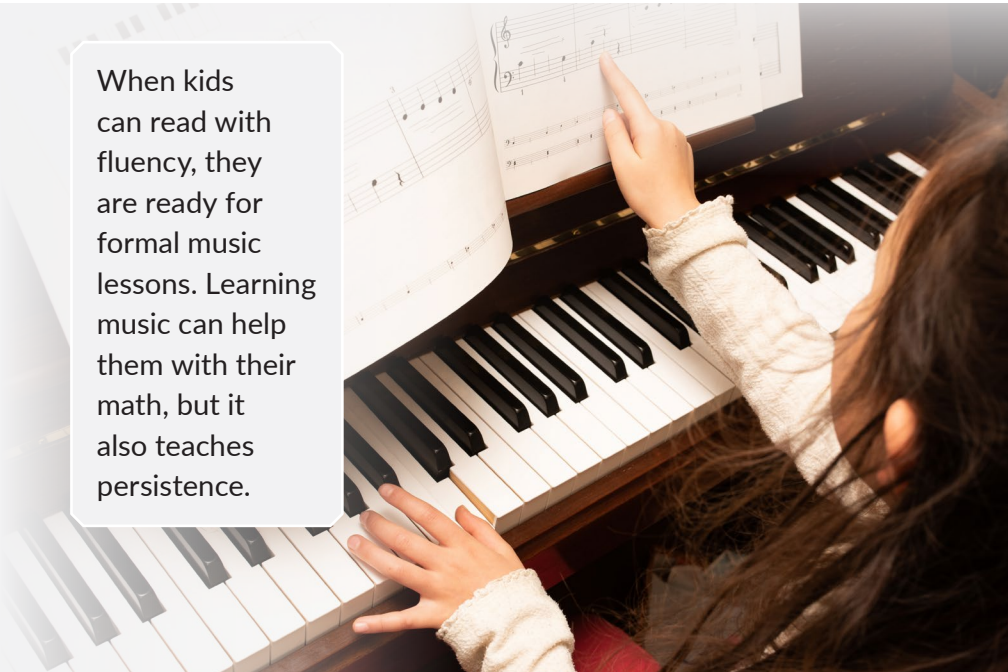
Investigate nature through beautifully photographed books or documentaries. Shows like *Planet Earth* let your kids fall in love with creation and provide countless mysteries for them to solve.

Allow children to start collections. Be patient as they fill your home with seashells, insects, and flowers. Your kids are sorting and organizing the universe. Provide collection boxes and display trays, and ask open-ended questions about their treasures. Why did you put all these feathers over here? Which one of these is your favorite rock? Kids love to verbally process what they've been sorting in their minds. Further, your showing interest in a collection they've worked hard to curate will strengthen your relationship with your child.

The Arts

Most kids love to express themselves through the visual arts—painting, clay modeling, crafting, finger knitting, cutting, and gluing. Around ages 5–6, they are keen to represent objects in the world. They love step-by-step instructions on how to draw objects like a dinosaur or a unicorn. Though art projects can be sloppy, they're worth the effort. Children learn about perspective, color theory, and composition. They develop patience and fine motor skills as they work. Stock a cabinet full of art supplies and inspire them by hanging inexpensive replicas of great works of art around your playroom or kitchen.

When kids can read with fluency, they are ready for formal music lessons. Learning music can help them with their math, but it also teaches persistence.



Kids also love to express themselves through music. Even before they're ready for formal lessons, a young child's world can be full of music—and full of the mind-expanding benefits of good music. Young children love to experiment with percussion: tambourines, maracas, triangles, tom-toms, and the like. Though a regular symphony of percussion might be too much to handle, a time each day when you take out the instruments and play along to some of your favorite music can become a cherished part of your daily routine.

And while creating or listening to music, most children can't resist learning through dance. Dancing is one of the most underrated brain boosters in your arsenal. Kids who dance not only burn lots of energy, but they also build connections between different parts of their brains. Dancing forges neural pathways, develops coordination, and strengthens kinesthetic awareness.

Household Chores

Household chores can encourage learning, nurture family bonds, and develop self-confidence in children. Back when most families were rural, all kids had meaningful chores to do at home or in the barn. Parents depended on their children to help the farm survive.

But in many families today, kids are growing up without chores. Some families hire domestic help. In others, parents prefer to just do chores themselves and get them done right. But even if you don't need your kids to work, your kids need work. Kids with household chores feel connected to their families. There's a bond that develops when kids feel that they're contributing something important to the family.

When kids first begin pitching in around the house, it's helpful to break their work down into microchores. Instead of saying "Go clean your room," chop the chore into bite-sized bits. As kids get older, they can graduate to more complex chores. A toddler might be able to drag a basket to the laundry room. A teenager might be capable of doing all the laundry for the family.

Kids need lots of instruction and inspection when they're learning new chores. It would certainly be faster and easier to do the job yourself—at first. But putting the time into training them will pay dividends. Your kids will eventually lighten your workload, grow closer to their family, and learn new skills that spill over into other parts of leaning.

It's important to remind ourselves that learning goes beyond academics and IQ is only a small part of being smart. A genius without character is a small contribution to mankind. We want to raise kids who love learning and love people. Broadening your vision of what constitutes education will help you do that.

Reading

Arment, *The Call of the Wild and Free*.

Satterfield, *Boosting Your Emotional Intelligence*.

Questions

1. What are some things you could do to encourage sustained imaginative play in your children?
2. How can you make the arts a regular part of your child's daily routine?
3. What are some chores you could assign your kids that would:
   a. be age appropriate?
   b. help them learn new skills?
   c. boost their confidence?
   d. make them feel valued in the family?

Lesson 7

WHAT HELPS STRUGGLING LEARNERS

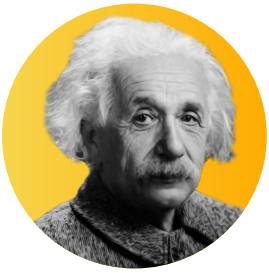
Sometimes as parents we can be doing everything right, and yet some kids still show little interest in learning or struggle to learn. We're providing our kids with a safe, predictable, and peaceful home. We've identified our teaching philosophy and our kids' learning styles. We're giving our kids the tools of learning, and we're organizing our homes in a way that promotes curiosity and exploration. We've read to our kids until our voices are hoarse. What's going on? And what can we do to help?

Learning Disabilities

First, you'll want to ascertain whether there is a genetic or neurological condition at play. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act contains a provision called Child Find, which mandates that public schools in America find children who have disabilities and need services. Any child, from birth to age 21, is eligible for a free evaluation, even if they're private-schooled or homeschooled. Parents should send a letter to the principal of their local public school requesting information on the referral process for an evaluation. If you suspect that a learning disability may be at the heart of your child's struggle, don't hesitate to schedule an evaluation.

Late Bloomers

There are a few possible reasons that a child with no learning disabilities might struggle with academics. Your child might be a late bloomer. This doesn't mean they're dumb; it's just that at age 6 or 8, their minds aren't ready to decode language. Their minds are busy, however, exploring the world and asking questions. Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein were both late bloomers.



If you suspect you have a late bloomer, try a little rest. If you force them to endure hours of phonics lessons before they're ready, you might kill their passion. Maybe try a little unschooling, where your child follows their muse and learns what delights them. Perhaps an alternative style school like Montessori might give your child the brain rest they need.

Sadly, many late bloomers have convinced themselves that they're not bright. Maybe they've been put in a special class at school or have been teased for not knowing how to read. As a parent, you have the power to reframe the narrative. Let your child know that you believe they're smart, and usher them to places where they'll succeed. Your words are powerful and have the ability to override the negative voices your child is hearing.

Underachievers

Another kind of kid who struggles with performance is the underachiever. Underachievers are usually very bright. They catch on to reading earlier than most of their peers and can ace classroom activities. Because they're so bright, they rarely have to work to get good grades. They often get bored in a classroom because they have to wait for the other kids to grasp what they got 20 minutes ago—or last week.

In their boredom, underachievers sometimes misbehave and cause trouble. They often develop the habit of laziness. This can come back to haunt them in high school or college, when their natural intelligence isn't enough to master the coursework.

The secret to encouraging underachievers is to find something that really motivates them to learn. You know your kids best: If you suspect their academic struggles stem from being an underachiever, figure out what motivates them, and try to work with that.

Dull Curriculum

Another cause for academic struggle is a dull curriculum. Some kids shut down when the curriculum is dull, the textbooks have no narrative, or assignments are full of busywork.

If your kids are enrolled in public school, you might have trouble changing the curriculum. School districts often enter into contracts with book publishers, and making alterations is like changing the course of an aircraft carrier. Private schools are sometimes more open to parent suggestions, but it can still be challenging to get an institution to change course. Clearly, with homeschooling, you have complete autonomy in choosing curriculum, but how do you go about making those choices?

Try to give yourself permission to make mistakes in choosing curriculum. Sometimes you won't realize you've made a bad choice until a few weeks have passed. Return the book if you can. Otherwise, chalk it up to learning.

Most textbooks are dry as dust, and that's because most of them are written by committees. Publishers receive lists of what must be included in their books to meet the curriculum requirements for each state, and teams of writers make sure all those boxes are checked so that the textbook has the broadest possible market. Paragraphs written by committees are stitched together by other committees. The result is a dull textbook with no narrative voice.

If you search, however, you can find textbooks that are written by only one author. Joy Hakim's *A History of US* has a winsome narrative voice that draws you in. Jay Wile writes high school science textbooks that sing. Harold Jacobs wrote a geometry textbook that is actually quite funny! If you find an excellent textbook written by one named author, you'll feel like you're reading a novel.

If the curriculum you've chosen has a silly assignment or one that you think is a waste of time, skip it! And don't feel like you must complete every last chapter of a book you've purchased. Traditional schools rarely complete textbooks by the end of the school year. Strive for enjoying the text, not racing through it.

Bullying

Finally, one more reason your child might not be thriving in school is bullying. Kids are teased about their weight, their clothes, or their acne. They get bullied in person and online. They're mocked for holding unpopular opinions or for holding fast to moral principles. It's a hard time to be a kid.

Dr. Walt Larimore, author of *The Highly Healthy Child*, writes that 86% of children in the US report being bullied and 10% of all high school dropouts cite bullying as the reason for their quitting school. Heartbreakingly, in extreme cases, bullying can lead to suicide. More often, bullying causes kids to withdraw. They shut down emotionally so they won't get hurt. They avoid activities where they might encounter other kids. They lose interest in things that used to delight them. Bullied kids often suffer from unexplained fatigue, fear, sleep disturbances, or vague physical ailments that crop up on school days. This is not the recipe for excelling academically.

If you believe your child is being bullied, talk to them. Let them know you're on their side—that they'll get through this and you're not going to leave them. Tell them it's not their fault. And get them off social media. If you feel it's appropriate, talk to their school administrators. But be careful: If the school doesn't handle the situation properly, your child might then endure even more bullying.

Examine your options to change schools or to homeschool. You might just want to homeschool for one year to let your child rebuild their confidence. Sometimes if children have just a little respite from their bullies, they can get some perspective and regroup. The bully's narrative doesn't have to become their reality.

Reset

Once you've identified what's causing your child to disengage academically, you can do a reset. Summer is the perfect time to pause academics for a short detox. You want a sharp line of demarcation between what your child did before and how things will work in the future.

If you discover you have a late bloomer and you've been cramming phonics lessons, put the books down for the summer. In the fall, don't even talk about letters until your child asks. Just read great books aloud and watch cool science videos.

If you discover your child has a neurological issue, take a summer study break and learn all about your child's condition. Consult doctors, tutoring centers, learning specialists, and websites like the Learning Disabilities Association of America or LearningRx. Then start back up in September with fresh insight into how your child's brain works.

If you have an underachiever, give them a purposeful, exciting assignment for the summer. Build a treehouse or start raising hens. Make them figure everything out on their own. Give them a meaningful reason to read, write, and calculate.

Kids can fall into bad habits easily, but they can develop good habits quite easily as well. Don't despair if your children seem unmotivated. With a little effort, you can turn that around so that they become lifelong learners.

Reading

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, https://sites.ed.gov/idea/.

Karlgaard, *Late Bloomers*.

Larimore, *The Highly Healthy Child*.

Questions

1. Can you identify the source of your child's struggle with learning?
2. What are some resets you could do this summer to overcome your child's roadblocks and prepare them for a life of learning?

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Lesson 8

WHEN TEENS LOVE TO LEARN

When your children enter adolescence, there will be so many new emotions. You might be more concerned about survival than raising a lifelong learner. But with a shift in perspective, you can save yourself some grief and really enjoy spending time with your adolescent kids. This lesson offers tips for raising a teen who loves to learn.

Mutual Respect

When kids enter adolescence, they want to separate from their parents and establish their unique identity. They try out different personas and positions. Parents can often confuse this experimentation with personal rejection—that their kids are rejecting their upbringing. Often, parents respond to this feeling of rejection with harsh criticism. Teens respond disrespectfully, and an ugly hurricane of insult and hurt ensues.

This is the shift in perspective: Allow teens to explore new ideas, but insist that they speak with respect as they do it. No yelling, condescension, or eye rolling. And when teens bounce their new ideas off you, listen respectfully. No lecturing or ridicule. We can challenge our kids' ideas or ask them to consider other arguments, but we need to do it with respect.

When the ground rules are mutual respect, teens actively seek out their parents' opinions on ideas they're exploring. But if parents respond hostilely without really listening, teens will often hunker down and embrace an idea just to be contrary. The ground rules of mutual respect keep the lines of communication open and encourage teens to analyze propositions rationally. And from time to time, you might just learn a thing or two from your teen.

Healthy Habits

Just like toddlers, teens thrive with lots of sleep, a healthy diet, and a peaceful home where the parents are in charge.

At around age 12, kids' sleep habits change dramatically. Their brains are wide awake at midnight, and they have trouble falling asleep. Consequently, they're often tired in the morning and want to sleep in. Homeschooling can give you more flexibility in school hours.

If your kids are attending traditional school, you'll want to help your younger teens turn their brains off at night. Lock up cell phones and turn off all blue-light sources hours before bedtime. Hot baths before bed often soothe and relax an active brain. Encourage your young teen to read a physical book before bed to put aside the day's events.

In addition to sleep habits, eating habits will change in the teen years. They might crave more vegetables, or they might have a larger appetite. When teens start earning their own money and can drive, they often spend money on fast food. This is partly social and shouldn't be troubling if you're feeding them a healthy diet for most of their meals at home. Keep an eye on it, though, because some teens develop bad eating habits that stick with them into adulthood.

Whether you homeschool or continue to enhance your teen's traditional schooling, options for formal education abound. Teenagers will often outpace their parents or teachers in a particular area, so it can be helpful to hire a tutor.

Adolescent kids still crave to be in a home where mom and dad are in charge. They may act rebellious and chafe at the rules, but deep down, they still crave the safety their parents provide. When kids are tiny, a parent's word is law. In the teen years, kids want to know that you're considering their opinions and that you value what they might contribute in making a decision. Try your best to hear them out, as long as they're speaking respectfully.

Maintaining a Culture of Curiosity

Maintaining a culture of curiosity as a child enters adolescence is profoundly important. Teens who have an active intellectual life and engage in fulfilling hobbies and activities are less likely to fall prey to negative peer pressure and make disastrous life choices.

Whatever struggles you endured as a teen have been amplified by an order of magnitude through social media. Teens who have an active life of the mind are buffered from many of these tragedies. It's not that they can avoid all the turmoil of the teen years, but they have alternatives to destructive behavior. If the whole crowd is going in a bad direction, they're OK to turn back and continue designing their robot or reading a Jane Austen novel. Boredom doesn't drive them to foolish distraction: They have worthy activities to fill their time. Young people with projects don't feel hopeless.

The primary villain during these years is social media. Teens can become so addicted to seeing what their friends or celebrities have to say that they can lose interest in all else. Social life might also involve a measure of video game play. If you cut your kid out of this world, you might cut them out of a social life. Your teenager, however, needs your wisdom. They will play morning, noon, and night if you permit them.

Provisioning your home for exploration will also take on a different look in these years. Where your goal in the grade school years was to present lots of options for your kids, in the teen years, you'll want to accommodate your kids' more specific interests. Instead of a closet full of arts and crafts supplies, your teen might want just an excellent set of acrylics and brushes. Instead of every LEGO piece ever created, your child might now want real building tools. Baking soda and vinegar might give way to Bunsen burners and graduated cylinders. The costume wardrobe might be put aside as you shuttle your teen to community theater play rehearsals. As your time and budget allow, equip your teens to follow their deepening interests.

Kids' activities outside the home also become specialized in these years. The teamwork and self-discipline from participating in organized sports can help build character, and kids also learn about performing under pressure.

Lastly, with teenagers, the habit of asking thought-provoking questions will take on a new spin. When your kids are younger, your questions are open-ended. You're just trying to get them to observe carefully. When kids are older, your questions can be more Socratic, challenging them to consider the hows and whys of a topic. You can begin with an initial premise and continue asking questions, leading them to a logical conclusion. Be careful to not come off as attacking or intimidating. Make sure your teens know that you are on a search for knowledge right along with them.

Expanding Opportunities

As your kids get older, the opportunities to expand their minds broaden. Family road trips, travel with friends, mission trips, and exchange programs are wonderful ways for your teen to experience what they've read about. Summer jobs, volunteering, and internships also broaden teens' brains. They learn job skills, but more importantly, they develop interpersonal skills.

In guiding teens, it can become easy to obsess over preparing them to get a job. We are designed to crave meaningful work, so thinking about a life's purpose is not a bad thing. But try not to think of your teens' education as a job-training program. Instead, think about teaching them to think critically, to solve problems creatively, and to argue persuasively. You can't predict what they'll do for a living in a decade or two, but you can prepare them to succeed.

Reading

Kahn Academy, https://www.khanacademy.org/.

Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*.

Questions

1. Can you improve your communication with your teen by adopting ground rules of mutual respect?
2. What are some ways you might rearrange your schedule or home to facilitate your teen's new habits of learning?

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Lesson 9

GROWING A FAMILY THAT LEARNS TOGETHER

When Donna first started homeschooling, she had enormous gaps in her learning. Her high school American history course never got past Reconstruction. She hadn't read many of the classics and couldn't place most countries on a map. And she had been using a calculator for so long that she barely remembered the times tables. Learning alongside her kids is a daily adventure for Donna. This lesson looks at how she raised 10 lifelong learners—and became one herself.

The Big Picture

In the early years of homeschooling, after teaching the three Rs, Donna decided that what her family needed to learn was the big picture. They all needed to understand the big, overarching story of the world—the streams of history and the stories of art, science, and philosophy. They also needed to know the places on the globe. After they had a framework for understanding the world, they could fill in the details.

She started by using the V. M. Hillyer classic, *A Child's History of the World*. Hillyer was a polymath with an exceptional grasp of history, and he was skilled at distilling complex events and explaining them in a grandfatherly tone that made history accessible to children. Donna would read a chapter of Hillyer every day to her children for all their years of grade school. By the time they got to junior high, they had the timeline of world history fixed in their heads. And all the while, Donna was beginning to learn the history of the world for the first time.

The family would often create their own visual timelines, lining the school room with butcher paper and filling in characters like Demosthenes or Napoleon as they read. When choosing read-aloud titles for her kids, Donna often picked historical fiction or well-written biographies to fill in some of the timeline entries. All of this brought history to life for the kids, but she also fell in love with studying history herself.

As her kids got a little older, she still focused on initially giving them the broad view of a topic, even as the topics became more specific. Joy Hakim does a great job introducing the grand sweep of American history. She also created a three-book series on the history of science, from Aristotle's crystalline spheres to the multiverse. Understanding the broad outline of science or American history helped the entire family create hooks to hang information on later.

Watching Great Courses like *A Brief History of the World* is an excellent way to get the big picture. This course helped Donna's family create file folders in their minds—places to put facts they'd eventually learn. Later, when they enjoyed in-depth courses like *Victorian Britain*, they had places to put all their new ideas and keep their learning organized.

Memorizing and Eavesdropping

Another way Donna learned alongside her kids when they were young was to memorize with them. It was often humbling to see how quickly they could memorize: They would sometimes coach her as she struggled through the Gettysburg Address or the Bill of Rights. But they would all learn together.

Learning alongside your child requires humility. If you keep a humble attitude, you'll realize that before your kids are very old, they will actually instruct you!

Sometimes, her little kids didn't really understand what they were memorizing. They were just storing lofty ideas in their heads for future use. But Donna's brain was actively analyzing those memorized words as she tried to fit them into her understanding of the world. She never complained of boredom.

Donna also learned alongside her kids by eavesdropping. When she hired tutors or music teachers, she'd try to stay in the room and learn from the teacher along with her child. She listened carefully and tried to do all the assigned homework by her son's chemistry tutor. And when it was time for her next child to learn advanced chemistry, she didn't need to hire a tutor.

Personal Learning

If you're in the busy years of raising a family, it may seem hard to carve out time for personal learning. When all of Donna's kids were little, she felt like she would never get to read a book again. Then it dawned on her that she could read books that interest her aloud to her kids. Not every story time had to feature damsels and dragons. Her kids were happy to sit and listen to Malcolm Gladwell or Wendell Berry.

She often had to stop to restate what she had just read aloud in words that younger kids could understand. This practice greatly improved her own reading comprehension and retention. You can't fake it to a 10-year-old. You have to really understand the work before you can restate it in simple terms.

Donna didn't limit her personal learning agenda to things she could read to her kids. Sometimes she would have a child practice reading aloud with a *Wall Street Journal* column that interested her. If she wanted to work a crossword puzzle, she'd find a kid who loved words and work it with them. If she was interested in an opera, she might take a break from the books and have all the kids watch *Aida* or *Hamilton* as school for the morning. Her personal interests didn't have to suffer because she was raising kids.

Since Donna was either pregnant, nursing, or both for 20 years straight, enrolling in a traditional class would have been a challenge for her. But she was able to sneak in Great Courses as she made dinner or folded laundry.

Car rides became sanctuaries of learning as she shuttled kids to their activities. These professors became her private tutors as she did the important but sometimes mind-numbing tasks required in raising a large family.

Donna has been able to fill in a lot of what was missing in her own formal education. Of course, the more you learn, the more you realize all there is to learn. What she once perceived as gaps in knowledge are actually gaping chasms—but they no longer terrify her. They are a daily challenge that makes life exciting. Humbly learning alongside her kids helped her build a framework for organizing knowledge, and she can now spend the rest of her life filling in the frame.

Reading

Hakim, *A History of US*.

Hillyer, *A Child's History of the World*.

Hurlbut, *The Story of the Bible*.

Questions

1. What are your personal objectives or interests as you learn alongside your child?
2. Can you identify tedious chores that might be transformed into oases of learning by listening to Great Courses while you work?

Curriculum Recommendations

When parents begin homeschooling, they often prefer to buy a box set: a one-stop, integrated curriculum that sets forth what to teach each day in each subject. While a box set takes a lot of the guesswork out of curriculum purchasing, it's a one-size-fits-all commodity, and it will probably disappoint you in some way.

Usually by year two, parents jettison the school-in-a-box and piece together curriculum that more specifically suits their teaching philosophy and their child's learning style. There are hundreds of choices in each category, but this list contains what Donna considers the best, time-tested resources that are reasonably priced. Don't buy them all; discover the ones that will work for your family.

It's easy to think that the more you buy, the smarter your child will be. The truth is that less is more. If your kids are young, start simply with a good phonics book, some lined paper, and some flash cards. Keep your library card handy to fill your house with great read-aloud choices. Download an app with read-aloud stories and maybe a math game app. Stock up on art supplies, and buy a tin whistle or some inexpensive percussion instruments. Then you can slowly, gently, and cheerfully begin to homeschool. It will become apparent when you need to supplement your books and supplies.

Phonics

Alpha-Phonics: A Primer for Beginning Readers

Phonics Pathways: Clear Steps to Easy Reading and Perfect Spelling

Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons

Writing

Fat Pencils

The Good and the Beautiful Handwriting Series

Handwriting Practice Paper

Italic Handwriting Series

Math

Hopscotch Memory Songs

Math Windows

Minute Math Electronic Flash Card

Triangle Flash Cards

History

A History of US

Historical Timeline Wall Panel

My Timeline Book of World History (Blank Timeline)

Geography

Draw the World: An Outline of Continents and Oceans

History of the World Map by Map

Illuminated Globe

Merriam-Webster's Student Atlas

Uncle Josh's Outline Map Book

World Map Poster

Science

The Animal Book: A Visual Encyclopedia of Life on Earth

Awesome Science Experiments for Kids

Handheld Magnifying Glass

Janice VanCleave's Big Book of Science Experiments

Peterson Field Guide Coloring Books

Wireless Digital Microscope

Fine Arts

Draw Write Now Boxed Set

Prismacolor Colored Pencils

Tin Whistle and Book

Watercolor Pencils

Foreign Language

Latin and Greek Root Word Flash Cards (A–L)

Latin and Greek Root Word Flash Cards (M–Z)

Bible

The Bible's Feasts

The Child's Story Bible

Classical Sunday School Teacher's Manual

Hurlbut's Story of the Bible

All-in-One Curriculum

Calvert Education Complete Homeschool Curriculum

Memoria Press Classical Core Curriculum

Donna's Favorite Great Courses

Middle School

Donna introduced her kids to formal lectures in middle school. She chose Great Courses that are a cross between college lecture and story time—great tales told with historical detail. These courses eased her kids into learning and prepared them for the more rigorous lectures they'd hear in high school.

Books That Have Made History: Books That Can Change Your Life

A Brief History of the World

Churchill

Famous Greeks

Famous Romans

Great Presidents

History of Freedom

History of Science: 1700–1900

History of Science: Antiquity to 1700

High School

In teaching high school at home, Donna tackled history and literature chronologically. Freshman year focused on the ancient world: They learned the history of Egypt, Greece, and Rome and read classical writers like Homer, Euripides, and Virgil. During sophomore year, they studied the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Reformation, along with literature that came from that period or was about that period. They studied authors like Shakespeare, Dante, and Cervantes.

Junior year focused on modern history, from the Enlightenment to the present day. They concentrated on British literature during this year, and senior year was dedicated to American history and literature. Of course, they also studied math, science, foreign language, religion, and fine arts. These courses were not approached chronologically.

Donna assigned her high school kids one or two lectures a day. Sometimes they'd listen while riding their bikes to practice or lifting weights in the basement. She would ask them to respond to one of the questions in the guidebook by writing a short essay each day. This habit of daily writing turned them all into good writers and helped cement the information they had learned in the lecture.

Freshman Year

The "Aeneid" of Virgil

Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age

Ancient Greek Civilization

Ethics of Aristotle

Greek Legacy: Classical Origins of the Modern World

Greek Tragedy

Herodotus: The Father of History

History of Ancient Egypt

The History of Ancient Rome

The "Iliad" of Homer

The "Odyssey" of Homer

Plato, Socrates, and the Dialogues

Understanding the Human Body: An Introduction to Anatomy and Physiology

Sophomore Year

Chemistry, 2nd Edition

Dante's "Divine Comedy"

The Era of the Crusades

Great Artists of the Italian Renaissance

The High Middle Ages

History of Christianity in the Reformation Era

A History of England from the Tudors to the Stuarts

The Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Rise of Nations

Junior Year

The Birth of the Modern Mind: The Intellectual History of the 17th and 18th Centuries

Europe and Western Civilization in the Modern Age

European History and European Lives: 1715 to 1914

From Monet to Van Gogh: A History of Impressionism

Victorian Britain

William Shakespeare: Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies

Senior Year

American Civil War

American Ideals: Founding a "Republic of Virtue"

Classics of American Literature

Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 3rd Edition

History of the United States, 2nd Edition

World War II: A Military and Social History

Great Children's Literature

For Early Readers

Bemelmans, Ludwig. *Madeline* .

Brown, Margaret Wise. *Big Red Barn*.

———. *Goodnight Moon*.

———. *The Runaway Bunny*.

Brumbeau, Jeff. *The Quiltmaker's Gift*.

Burton, Virginia Lee. *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*.

Carle, Eric. *The Very Busy Spider*.

———. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Dalgliesh, Alice. *The Bears on Hemlock Mountain*.

———. *The Courage of Sarah Noble*.

dePaola, Tomie. *Tomie's Little Mother Goose*.

DiCamillo, Kate. *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*.

———. *Mercy Watson: Six Pig Tales*.

Edmonds, Walter. *The Matchlock Gun*.

Freeman, Don. *Corduroy*.

Galdone, Paul. *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*.

Hall, Donald. *The Ox-Cart Man*.

Hoban, Russell. *Bread and Jam for Frances*.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *The Snowy Day*.

Leaf, Munro. *The Story of Ferdinand*.

Lobel, Arnold. *Frog and Toad Storybook Treasury*.

McCloskey, Robert. *Blueberries for Sal*.

———. *Make Way for Ducklings*.

Numeroff, Laura. *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*.

———. *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*.

Peters, Lisa Westberg. *Cold Little Duck, Duck, Duck*.

Potter, Beatrix. *The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse*.

Rey, H. A. *Curious George*.

Slate, Joseph. *Who Is Coming to Our House?*

Slobodkina, Esphyr. *Caps for Sale*.

Spier, Peter. *People*.

Steig, Jeanne. *A Handful of Beans: Six Fairy Tales*.

Tresselt, Alvin. *White Snow, Bright Snow*.

Yashima, Taro. *Crow Boy*.

For Stronger Readers or for Adults to Read Aloud

Alcott, Louisa May. *Jo's Boys*.

———. *Little Women*.

Atwater, Richard. *Mr. Popper's Penguins*.

Banks, Lynne Reid. *The Indian in the Cupboard*.

Bendick, Jeanne. *Archimedes and the Door of Science*.

Burnett, Frances Hodgson. *A Little Princess*.

———. *The Secret Garden*.

Burnford, Sheila. *The Incredible Journey*.

Colfer, Eoin. Artemis Fowl Series.

Colum, Padraic. *The Children's Homer*.

D'Aulaire, Ingri. *Benjamin Franklin*.

———. *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths*.

———. Set of Illustrated Biographies.

Dahl, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Daugherty, James. *Of Courage Undaunted*.

de Angeli, Marguerite. *The Door in the Wall*.

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*.

DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn-Dixie*.

———. *The Tale of Despereaux*.

Forbes, Esther. *Johnny Tremain*.

Foster, Genevieve. *Abraham Lincoln's World*.

———. *Augustus Caesar's World*.

———. *George Washington's World*.

George, Jean Craighead. *My Side of the Mountain*.

Gipson, Fred. *Old Yeller*.

Grahame, Kenneth. *The Wind in the Willows*.

Gray, Elizabeth Janet. *Adam of the Road*.

Henry, Marguerite. *Misty of Chincoteague*.

Henty, G. A. *The Dragon and the Raven*.

Herriot, James. *All Things Bright and Beautiful*.

Holling, Holling C. *Minn of the Mississippi*.

———. *Seabird*.

———. *Tree in the Trail*.

Hunkin, Oliver. *Dangerous Journey: The Story of Pilgrim's Progress*.

Krumgold, Joseph. *Onion John*.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Latham, Jean Lee. *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*.

Lewis, C. S. *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

London, Jack. *Call of the Wild*.

Lowry, Lois. *Number the Stars*.

MacDonald, George. *The Princess and the Goblin*.

McGraw, Eloise Jarvis. *The Golden Goblet*.

———. *Moccasin Trail*.

Milne, A. A. *The House at Pooh Corner*.

Montgomery, L. M. *Anne of Green Gables*.

O'Dell, Scott. *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*.

Rawls, Wilson. *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

Rowling, J. K. The Harry Potter Series.

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*.

Selden, George. *The Cricket in Times Square*.

Sewell, Anna. *Black Beauty*.

Speare, Elizabeth G. *The Bronze Bow*.

Spyri, Johanna. *Heidi*.

Stevenson, Robert Lewis. *Kidnapped*.

———. *Treasure Island*.

Sutcliffe, Rosemary. *Black Ships before Troy: The Story of the "Iliad."*

———. *The Wanderings of Odysseus*.

Taylor, Mildred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*.

———. The Lord of the Rings Trilogy.

White, E. B. *Charlotte's Web*.

———. *Stuart Little*.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. Little House on the Prairie Series.

Wyss, Johann David. *The Swiss Family Robinson*.

Yates, Elizabeth. *Amos Fortune, Free Man*.

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Andreola, Karen. *A Charlotte Mason Companion: Personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning*. 2nd ed. Charlotte Mason Research & Supply Company, 1998. A sweet synthesis of the 18th-century British education pioneer's work, adapted for modern families.

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Baer, Donna. "Parenting Styles: A Straight Path through the Maze." https://stronghappyfamily.wordpress.com/2020/05/29/parenting-styles-a-straight-path-through-the-maze/. A discussion of various parenting styles.

Bauer, Susan Wise, and Jessie Wise. *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*. 4th ed. W. W. Norton, 2016. A practical, how-to guide for applying the classical method to homeschooling.

Behr, Gregg, and Ryan Rydzewski. *When You Wonder, You're Learning: Mister Rogers' Enduring Lessons for Raising Creative, Curious, Caring Kids*. Hachette Go, 2021. This book reveals what Fred Rogers called the tools for learning: curiosity, creativity, and collaboration.

Bendt, Valerie. *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*. Family Learning Center/Common, 1990. A practical primer on how to create homeschool unit studies for kids of multiple ages.

Blumenfeld, Samuel. *Alpha-Phonics: A Primer for Beginning Readers*. 41st ed. Paradigm Company, 2015. A beloved phonics program that is simple to implement and produces great results.

Bogart, Julie. *The Brave Learner: Finding Everyday Magic in Homeschool, Learning, and Life*. TarcherPerigee, 2019. Bogart shows parents how to make room for surprise, mystery, risk, and adventure in their family's routine so they can create an environment that naturally moves learning forward.

Chapman, Gary. *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*. Reprint ed. Northfield Publishing, 2015. A helpful framing of communication dynamics in a family and a useful resource in calming strife in a marriage or with kids.

Clarkson, Sally. *Awaking Wonder: Opening Your Child's Heart to the Beauty of Learning*. Bethany House Publishers, 2020. Clarkson, a true mom mentor, chronicles how she inspired her four children to become active learners.

Engelmann, Siegfried, Phyllis Haddox, and Elaine Bruner. *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons*. Touchstone, 1986. A phonics program that is easy to use and produces excellent results.

Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Public Domain. Franklin describes his autodidactic education.

Hakim, Joy. *A History of US*. Oxford University Press, 2007. An excellent American history series written in an engaging voice. It reads like a good novel. Good for read-aloud for younger kids or self-study for confident readers.

———. *The Story of Science: Aristotle Leads the Way*. Smithsonian Books, 2004. These titles do an excellent job of painting the big picture of the history of science. They're very engaging and include lots of hard science, not just narrative about science.

———. *The Story of Science: Einstein Adds a New Dimension*. Smithsonian Books, 2007.

———. *The Story of Science: Newton at the Center*. Smithsonian Books, 2005.

Hall, Megan Olivia. *Awesome Kitchen Science Experiments for Kids: 50 STEAM Projects You Can Eat!* Rockridge Press, 2020. Lots of easy science experiments you can do in your kitchen.

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Hillyer, Virgil Mores, and E. G. Huey. *A Child's Geography of the World*. Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1935. Though in places outdated, this is still one of the best introductions to geography for children.

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———. *A Child's History of Art: Painting*. Calvert Educational Services, 2004. Hillyer beautifully describes the history of painting.

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