

Curriculum Approaches

WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

Curriculum is a body of knowledge to be transmitted. Curriculum involves a formulation of objectives, selection and organization of content, selection and organization of learning experiences, and evaluation or assessment. It can be defined as any program or plan of activities.

WHAT IS A LEARNING APPROACH OR HOMESCHOOLING METHOD?

A learning approach is a method used to teach or provide instruction. Your approach to homeschooling will likely evolve and change over time, but it is helpful to select a method or combination of methods as you begin homeschooling to provide you with a general direction, and then adjust as needed down the road.

An Overview of Common Approaches

TRADITIONAL/TEXTBOOK

- ★ Textbook-based curriculum has graded textbooks in each subject and follows a scope and sequence that covers each subject in daily increments for a 12-year, 180-days-a-year academic program.
- ★ It is generally a grade-level packaged curriculum.
- ★ This approach compartmentalizes subject areas, uses textbooks, and relies on teacher-driven content.
- ★ Teacher manuals with clear lesson plans and schedules, tests, and record-keeping materials are usually included.
- ★ The textbook approach is what is typically used in a public school setting.
- ★ This approach can be good for parents who are looking for a lot of structure with set coursework and typical curriculum.

PROS: Can be easy to implement, requiring less teacher prep time, and is structured.

CONS: Not as flexible, scalable, or creative as some families need. May reduce the amount of parent-child interaction. Can tend to bog families down with busy work.

CURRICULUM EXAMPLES: BJU Press Homeschool, Alpha Omega Publications, Christian Light Education, Rod and Staff, Abeka, Christian Liberty Press, BookShark, Moving Beyond the Page, Oak Meadow, Power Homeschool

CLASSICAL EDUCATION

- ★ The Classical method began in the Middle Ages and was the approach used by some of the greatest minds in history.
- ★ The main goal is to cultivate independent thinkers and develop great communicators and leaders.
- ★ An essay by author Dorothy Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” is the basis of this Christian homeschooling method.
- ★ Children are taught tools of learning, collectively known as the Trivium. It is a teaching method that tailors the curriculum to a child’s cognitive development stages. The Classical home views the child’s school year in three separate four-year cycles: the Grammar Stage, the Dialectic or Logic Stage, and the Rhetoric Stage.

PROS: Teaches history chronologically and ties curriculum together across subjects for a holistic result. There are many resources available and there is a high level of parent-child interaction. There is a strong emphasis on literature and other classic writings.

CONS: This method can be time consuming and involve complicated prep work. Parents must usually put together curriculum from a variety of sources. The scope of areas to cover can be too scholarly for some families.

CLASSICAL EDUCATION RESOURCES: *Teaching the Trivium* by Harvey and Laurie Bluedorn (triviumpursuit.com), *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home* by Susan Wise-Bauer (welltrainedmind.com), *Classical Christian Education Made Approachable* by Classical Conversations (classicalconversations.com), *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Andrew Kern, *Trivium Mastery: The Intersection of Three Roads: How to Give Your Child an Authentic Classical Education* by Diane Lockman. **CURRICULUM:** Memoria Press, Veritas Press, Classical Academic Press, Logos Press, and My Father’s World combines Classical and Charlotte Mason education with unit studies.

CHARLOTTE MASON METHOD / LIVING BOOKS/ WHOLE BOOKS

- ★ The Charlotte Mason method, living books, and whole books approaches vary, but contain many of the same features. All three involve children in real-life situations, ample creative play time, respecting children as persons, and they focus on reading really good books rather than just portions of good books.
- ★ One begins by teaching basic reading, writing, and math skills, then exposing children to the best sources of knowledge for all other subjects, taking nature walks, observing wildlife, visiting museums, and reading real books for subjects such as geography, history, and literature.
- ★ Charlotte Mason was an influential British educator in the 19th century who advocated developing the soul and spirit of a child. Her method is literature based with English and other subjects taught in an integrated way. The Charlotte Mason method is not unschooling. Charlotte Mason is teacher-directed, but allows plenty of free time for exploring areas of interest.
- ★ A hallmark of the Charlotte Mason approach is narration: the telling back by the student in their own words of what was just read or heard. Nature study and time outdoors are also key.
- ★ Living Books are usually written in narrative or story form by one author who has a passion for his/her topic. A living book makes the subject come alive vs. a dry, boring textbook.

PROS: A child's days are balanced with spending sufficient time with the core subjects while also allowing a good deal of free time to enjoy life and explore areas of interest. Gets children interacting with their world, building good habits, and learning how to observe God's world in detail. Works to preserve that wonderful curiosity that many children tend to lose as they get older. It allows for a lot of creativity.

CONS: May seem too touchy-feely for parents seeking a more rigorous approach to their child's education. Good books can be expensive. Some parents may feel overwhelmed at the whole idea of using a curriculum consisting of Living Books and are uncertain as to whether or not their choice of books would be the right one.

RESOURCES: *Simply Charlotte Mason* (simplycharlottemason.com) - free curriculum guide sharing Charlotte Mason style resources for all subjects and grades, *The Whole-Hearted Child* by Clay and Sally Clarkson, *Charlotte Mason Companion* by Karen Andreola, *Charlotte Mason Study Guide* by Penny Gardner, *Ambleside Online* (amblesideonline.com), Higher Up and Further In, *Greenleaf Press* - twaddle-free history resources (greenleafpress.com), *Living Books Curriculum* (livingbookscurriculum.com).

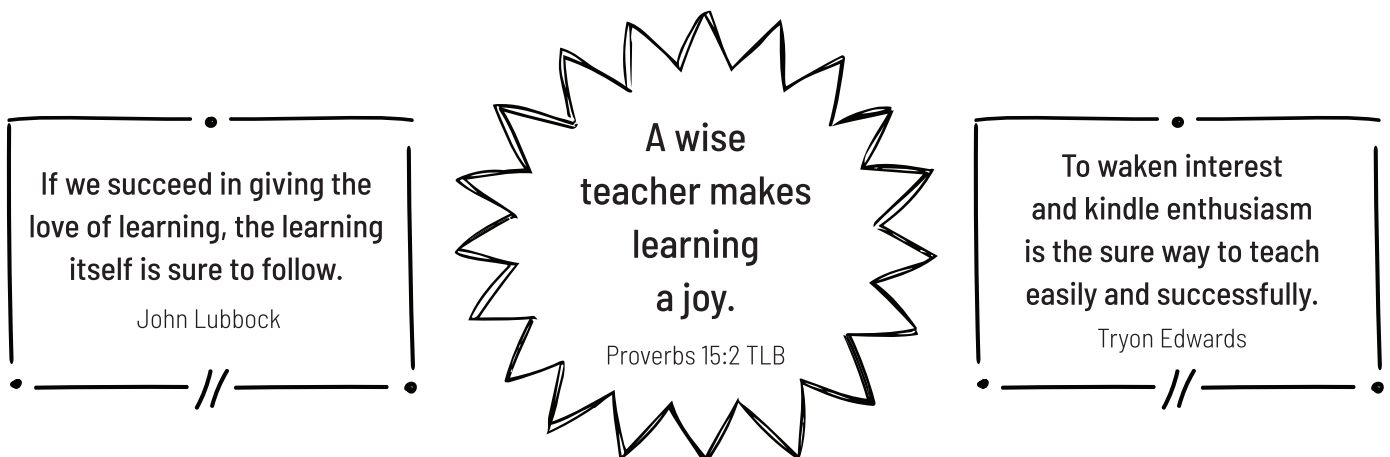
LITERATURE-BASED APPROACH

Literature-based instruction utilizes authors' original narrative and expository works as the core for experiences to support children in developing literacy. It is much more than giving students quality literature; it is doing the authentic things with the literature that all writers and readers would naturally do (such as dialogue about the book), and giving students support with these activities as they need it.

PROS: The opportunity to pass on a love for truly great books that inspire your kids to be lifelong learners. Engage in heartfelt, thoughtful discussions with your children on a regular basis. Allows for teaching children of multiple ages together.

CONS: There is *a lot* of reading. If you or your children do not find pleasure in reading, this approach could be frustrating. Not as much of a hands-on activity focus as some other approaches. Doesn't necessarily utilize a chronological approach to teaching history.

CURRICULUM EXAMPLES: Sonlight, Bookshark, Veritas Press, Robinson Curriculum, Lamplighter Press, Tapestry of Grace, Moving Beyond the Page, Beautiful Feet, Heart of Dakota, Winter Promise, Five in a Row, Living Books Curriculum, TruthQuest History, BiblioPlan.



UNIT STUDIES

- ★ The Unit Study approach is designed to give both in-depth and broad understandings of subjects revolving around some entire theme that interests the child. This integrated approach includes science, math, geography, art, music, history, language, literature, drama, and creative movement. It is often referred to as a multi-disciplinary or a thematic approach; an experiential, hands-on approach to learning.
- ★ Unit studies use your child's interests and then ties those interests into subject areas like math, reading, spelling, science, art, & history.
- ★ Children are given ample time to think, experiment, and discover each topic through his/her own natural way of learning.
- ★ There are packaged unit studies available for purchase or you can create your own.
- ★ Lapbooks work nicely with unit studies.

PROS: Children of all ages and different levels can learn together. Relatively low in cost, especially if you create your own. The child gets an in-depth understanding of each topic and develops mastery and retention of a topic.

CONS: A Parents can sometimes be overzealous and make a unit study out of everything, which can be overwhelming and might diminish a child's desire to mention an interest. Unit studies can be time consuming and labor intensive to create and put together your own.

UNIT STUDY RESOURCES: *Unit Studies* by Amanda Bennett (unitstudy.com), *KONOS* (konos.com), *Homeschool Unit Study Planner* by Donna Young (donnayoung.org), *Five in a Row* by Jane Lambert - preschool through 8th grade, *Further Up and Further In* by Diane Pendergraft - a literature-based unit study on the Chronicles of Narnia, *My Father's World* curriculum - classical, Charlotte Mason, unit studies combined (mfwbooks.com), *Tapestry of Grace* (tapestryofgrace.com), *Trail Guide to Learning* (home-school-curriculum.com), *The Weaver Curriculum* (aophomeschooling.com), *TRISMS* - designed for grades 5 through high school; research-based (trisms.com), Heart of Dakota, Gather 'Round Homeschool, Learning Adventures Unit Studies

ECLECTIC

- ★ An eclectic approach involves using a variety of homeschooling methods and resources to come up with an approach that works best for your family. Unless you choose a strictly textbook approach with a grade-level packaged curriculum, most homeschoolers are eclectic to some degree. Eclectic homeschoolers may use workbooks for math, reading, and spelling, but take a unit study approach for history and science, for example.
- ★ Eclectic does not mean unorganized or erratic. Families who take an eclectic approach have specific educational goals for their children and they make deliberate and purposeful choices about the resources they use. Eclectic homeschoolers trust their own judgment to select and piece together the best curriculum from various methods and philosophies to complement their child's learning needs.
- ★ Eclectic homeschooling is an efficient way to teach children of various ages who have different interests, abilities, and learning styles.

PROS: The parent gets to choose what resources and curricula work best for their family during different seasons of homeschooling and get to study subjects and topics they believe are most important at a more thorough level.

CONS: Parents who lack confidence or direction as they begin homeschooling may feel a bit lost in selecting resources and curricula in a piecemeal fashion because there are so many options available.

RESOURCES: Library books, literature lists (e.g. Honey for a Child's Heart), Timberdoodle, Rainbow Resource, Time4Learning.com, and a wide variety of curriculum providers.

The Manos Family Eclectic Approach Resources

After one and a half years of using a grade-level packaged curriculum (traditional approach), our family changed course and moved to an eclectic approach that better fit our needs. Some of the curricula and resources we used:

Math-U-See, Spelling Power, Easy Grammar, Daily Grams, The Mystery of History, Trail Guide to World Geography, unit studies on a variety of topics that we created on our own (the human body, US geography, mammals), plus enrichment classes our children took (creative writing, expository writing, ASL), science experiments and studies inspired by library books and Internet searches, Real Science 4 Kids, Rainbow Science by Beginnings Publishing House, Greenleaf Press history guides, Sower Series biographies, and more.

UNSCHOOLING / RELAXED

- ◆ This educational approach consists of practices that allow the children to learn through play, household responsibilities, social interaction, natural life experiences, and self-directed activities rather than any type of traditional curriculum. Also known as interest-driven, child-led, self-directed, curiosity-driven, or organic learning.
- ◆ Some naysayers believe a child needs more structure and conventional schooling, but unschooling parents believe self-driven education in a natural environment is the best approach to prepare a child for the real world.
- ◆ Unschoolers generally avoid use of textbooks, reviewing, quizzing, and formal testing. There is no use of lesson plans, a defined “school” time, or any type of grading. There is a large emphasis on imagination, nature, art, music, and almost no formal curriculum is used.
- ◆ The unschooling approach is often associated with John Holt, a 20th century American educator, who concluded that children have an innate desire to learn and a curiosity that drives them to learn what they need to know when they need to know it.
- ◆ Unschooling is not a rejection of education, but gives children the opportunity to learn through their own natural curiosity. Parents provide a supportive environment for their children to learn about things they are interested in at their own pace.

PROS: Freedom to explore and learn through hands-on, real-life situations. Family relationships can grow and develop as parents and children explore the child’s areas of interest together. Works well for families with multiple children to be able to learn together without competition. Children are empowered to learn for themselves. There is no division between life and learning.

CONS: This approach can seem chaotic because of the lack of structure. Others may be critical of this approach and share their disapproval with you and your children. Having no testing or grading system can make it difficult to understand how or how much a child is learning. Resources are not always readily available, especially when a child wants to learn something on the fly.

UNSCHOOLING RESOURCES: *Growing Without Schooling* (johnholtgws.com), *The Relaxed Home School* by Mary Hood, *The Unschooling Handbook* by Mary Griffith, *Homeschooling for Excellence* by David and Micki Colfax, *How Children Learn* by John Holt, Outschoool.com, *The Brave Learner: Finding Everyday Magic in Homeschool, Learning, and Life* by Julie Bogart, *Sandra Dodd’s Big Book of Unschooling* by Sandra Dodd, *Life Through the Lens of Unschooling* by Pam Liracchia



Additional Resources

Preschool at Home: What Do I Do with My Child Before Kindergarten?

by Debby Freely

Ultimate Book of Homeschooling Ideas: 500+ Fun & Creative Learning Activities for Kids 3-12

Linda Dobson

Learn Differently

learndifferently.com

SPED Homeschool

spedhomeschool.com

Cathy Duffy Reviews

cathyduffyreviews.com

The Big WHAT NOW Book of Learning Styles

by Carol Barnier

The High School Handbook: Junior and Senior High at Home

by Mary Schofield