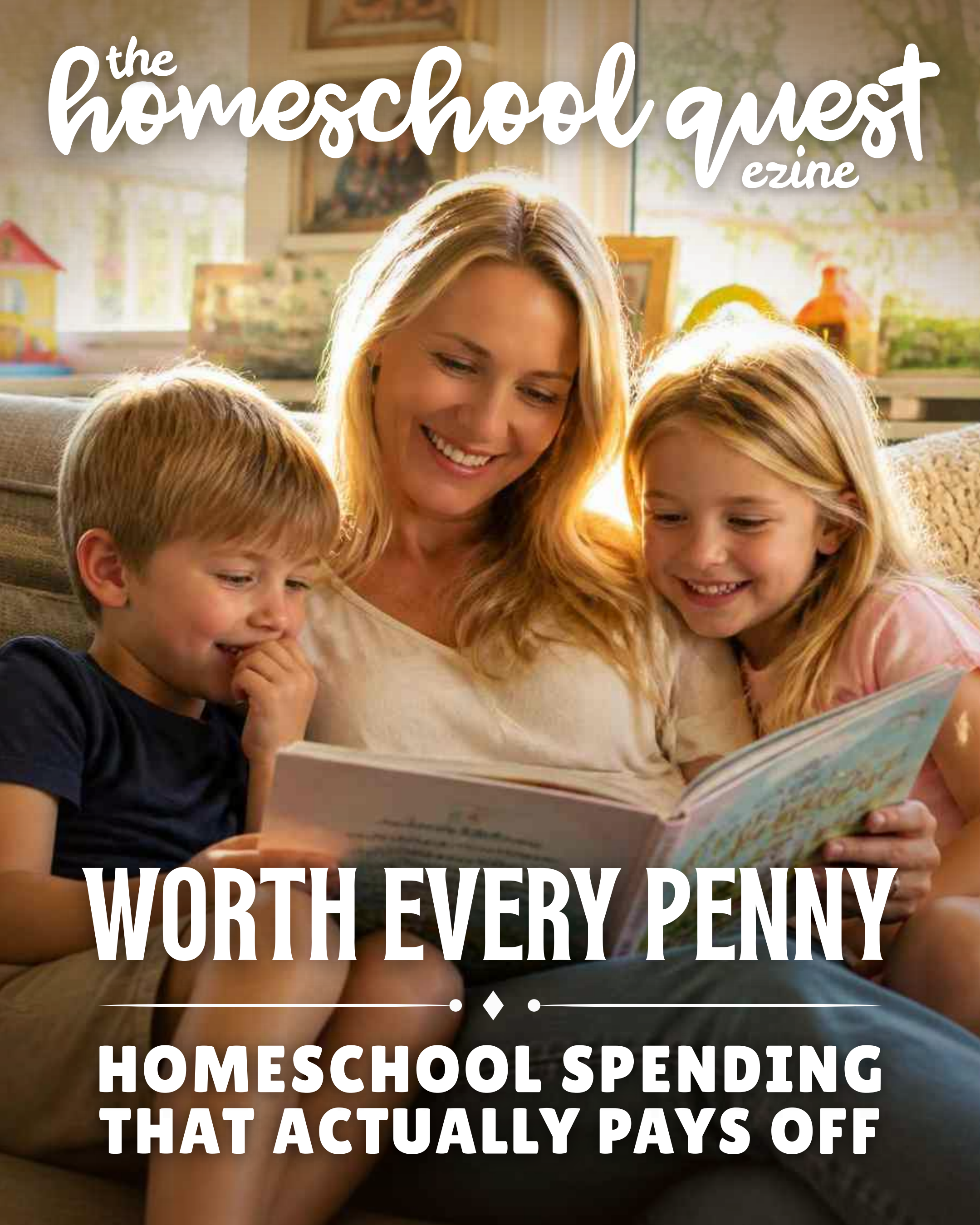

the homeschool quest ezine

WORTH EVERY PENNY

HOMESCHOOL SPENDING THAT ACTUALLY PAYS OFF

Welcome homeschoolers!

Some of our best homeschool days weren't the ones we planned perfectly, they were the ones where we found what actually worked. This issue is packed with honest stories from moms who've been through the trial and error themselves: the resources that finally clicked, the low-cost finds that outperformed the expensive ones, and the small discoveries that made a real difference. Pour your coffee and settle in.

Janet DeField
Co-founder of the Homeschool Quest

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSOR:
FunCation Academy

Create Your Homeschool's North Star

Write a mission and vision statement for your homeschool. It literally becomes your North Star. Also create an evaluation checklist for you as the teacher and your child as the student. Review it regularly to make sure you stay on track toward your vision.

Nikki Lee

HOMESCHOOL MOM

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By Taylor Frank

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By Tina McNelis Arozena of Tide Wind Academy Homeschool

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Spending Less on Curriculum Without Sacrificing College Readiness

By Meryl van der Merwe of fundafunda.com

All-in-One or Mix-and-Match? A Real Homeschool Family's Honest Take

By Melissa Muir of Curio

YOU DON`T NEED THE PERFECT CURRICULUM

How to choose what's right for your family without overspending

BY TAYLOR FRANK

YOU DON`T NEED THE PERFECT CURRICULUM

How to choose what's right for your family without overspending

The bright lights of the store illuminate rows and rows of books. Books of all sizes with shiny, decorative colors, each one more beautiful than the next. They all make promises to teach your child to read in 30 days or less, offer math strategies that will rock your socks, and some even offer a curriculum so easy to use that your child will be able to follow it without even needing you in the room. Then you pick them up to find that these all-inclusive curriculums have a price tag that rivals next month's car payment. So you begin to wonder, "Can I even afford to homeschool?" When it comes to the education of your child and what they need to succeed, you are the most qualified person on the planet!

YOU DON`T NEED THE PERFECT CURRICULUM

Start With How Your Child Learns

Homeschooling your child doesn't require fancy, all-inclusive curriculums. It just takes a parent who is invested in their education, showing up each day, ready to teach them in the way that they learn best. Now before we start, I want to say that I have nothing against curriculum packages. For the most part, I think they are great and an awesome guide to those who want to use them. It is also okay if you want to mix and match these curriculum packages to meet your child's needs. What I am saying is that these curriculums aren't necessary. They can absolutely make our lives easier, but the price tag can often be steep. Being able to homeschool our children often means that we are a family living off one income, and that price can be daunting.

YOU DON`T NEED THE PERFECT CURRICULUM

So how do you choose what is best for your child without breaking the bank? Take a look at how your child learns best. Is your child a visual learner? Do they work better when using technology, or is that a distraction to them? Are they better at retaining information when movement is involved, or when they write down what they have heard? What subjects are they strongest in? All these questions will help you determine how to choose or create a curriculum that is best for your child.

YOU DON`T NEED THE PERFECT CURRICULUM

Think About What Your Homeschool Day Looks Like

The next question to ask yourself is what your homeschool day will look like. There is no right or wrong answer here, but it is something to consider when picking out the curriculum that is going to be the best fit for your child and your family. Some parents plan to homeschool for the entire day, breaking it up into subject areas like a traditional classroom setting, while others prefer to homeschool for a couple of hours per day and get everything done during that block of time. This decision is all about what fits the needs of your family best.

If homeschool in your house is more of a hybrid model, you can choose an online platform with self-paced guides to help you navigate the homeschool process. This is what my family does, and it has been great so far. It allows my children to take turns completing the "technology" portion of the day while I work with their sibling on other activities. These activities include experiments, learning games, activity pages, and reading aloud. Once we finish that activity, they switch. This allows me to focus on who needs more help at that time while allowing my other child to continue working and feel confident in what they are doing. Many of the online homeschooling platforms are monthly subscriptions, which is a more cost-efficient option for a lot of families. Large text-based curriculums can require hundreds of dollars, while enrolling online can mean smaller payments ranging from $20 to $50 per month depending on the website.

YOU DON`T NEED THE PERFECT CURRICULUM

Or Build Your Own Curriculum From Free Resources

Another option is to choose no curriculum and create your own pacing guide at the beginning of the year. This option requires more work on the front end but saves a great deal of money. The first part of this is to plan out your year, what topics you plan to cover, and then pair those with activities. To do this, you can log into online freebie sites and check out homeschool blogs to get activities that follow your plan while also being engaging. There are multiple online platforms that are free to use, such as Splash Learn, PBS Kids, and even Teach Your Monster to Read. Incorporating these gives you a curriculum that is budget-friendly and well-rounded. This type of curriculum can be paired with trips to the library to find books that pair well with the subject or unit you are covering that week.

No matter what route you go, planning your curriculum does not have to be expensive, and it certainly does not have to be complicated. No one in the world is more equipped to teach your children than you are. Ask them what they enjoy learning about, figure out how they learn best, and go for it!

Read & Share This Article

Try a Placement Test

Give your child a quick placement test before choosing a grade level in each subject. Kids don't always land neatly on their age based grade, especially in math and reading. Testing first keeps you from buying materials that are too easy or too hard, and saves you from having to buy the right level all over again.

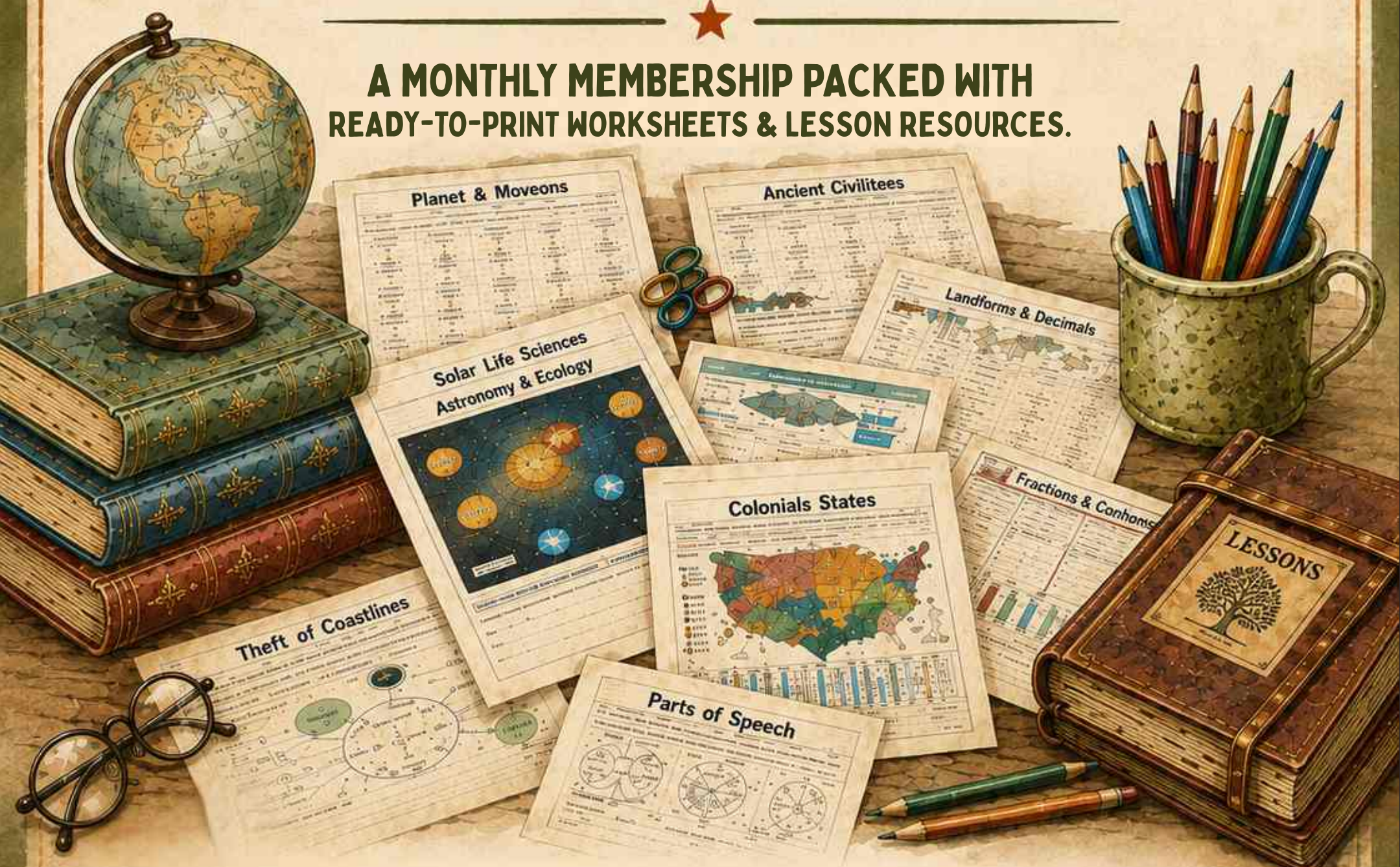
Steph Wilda

HOMESCHOOL MOM

SCHOOLHOUSE ONLINE

Teachers Filing Cabinet Access

A MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP PACKED WITH READY-TO-PRINT WORKSHEETS & LESSON RESOURCES.



Get instant access to hundreds of ready-to-print worksheets, unit studies, and lesson activities for PreK through 12th grade. You'll also find planners, trackers, and other organization tools to help you plan faster, plus access to a community of homeschool moms for support.

Sign up for $9.97/month!

THE INSIGHTFUL SCHOLAR

Ancient Civilizations

FREE CHAPTER

Try before you buy: get a free sample chapter from a full year of ancient history curriculum.

This free download includes the introduction and first chapter of both the reading book and workbook from a full-year Ancient Civilizations curriculum.

It covers Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and treats religious texts as one historical perspective rather than settled fact. A solid way to try the curriculum before buying.

FREE Download!

Tools That Make Life Easier

Buy things that actually make your life easier, a good printer, a laminator, a sturdy binder. Then put your remaining budget toward quality literature and solid art and craft supplies instead of extras you won't use. A few well-chosen tools go further than a cart full of things that sound nice but rarely get touched.

Angela Hussey

HOMESCHOOL MOM

Igniting the Spark

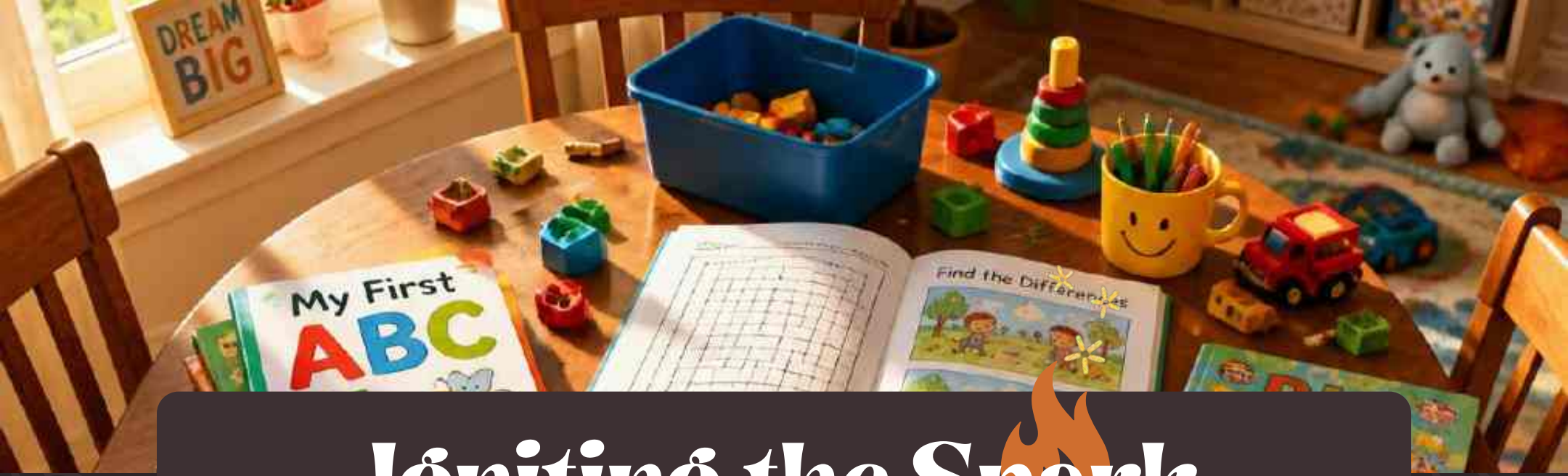
Why Your Homeschooler's Interests are the Ultimate Educational Compass

By Tina Arozena of Tide Wind Academy Homeschool

Igniting the Spark

Early on in homeschooling, I can still recall all the mornings I spent staring at a laptop screen and a mountain of digital curriculum that feels more like an obstacle than a resource. Between the breakfast cleanup, the hum of the dryer, the barking of our dogs, and the dozens of resources I have started to create for other families but have not quite polished for my own, it is easy to feel like I am drowning in the roles of Principal, Teacher, Lunch Lady, and Counselor all at once. There are moments when the weight of these responsibilities makes the "daily grind" feel less like a calling and more like a heavy burden.

But then I catch a glimpse of my daughter, and I am grounded in our true purpose. I think back to the girl she used to be, the one who was being bullied and whose confidence was eroding in a traditional setting where her unique spirit was overlooked. Bringing her home was a commitment to protecting her heart and ensuring our faith was the very air we breathed rather than just a weekend activity. In our home, we live by a simple conviction: when a homeschooler is truly captivated by a subject, their productivity follows naturally. By letting my daughter help navigate her own educational path and letting her choose courses that mirror her interests, we have traded a rigid, impersonal system for a journey rooted in purpose and peace.



Igniting the Spark

There is an immense pressure to mirror the timelines of a traditional institution, but those schedules were built for a crowd, not for your unique homeschooler. We often get wrapped up in imaginary rules, forgetting that these structures were never designed with our homeschooler's specific needs in mind. When you prioritize your homeschooler's emotional well-being over a specific digital lesson plan, you are not lagging behind, you are finally operating at the exact rhythm they need to flourish. True mastery happens when a homeschooler feels safe enough to explore a topic at their own speed, the "pace of grace," without the fear of falling behind a state average.

We have discovered that the six or seven hours spent in a typical classroom often translate to just a few hours of deep, intentional work at home, whether that is at the table or on the couch. This efficiency does not just check a box, it restores their time, allowing them to pursue hobbies, rest, and lean into their natural talents. For example, a homeschooler interested in digital art might spend their "extra" hours mastering complex software, or a homeschooler fascinated by history might spend an entire afternoon diving into online primary sources. This extra time is where the "restoration phase" happens, allowing them to play, create, and heal from the pressures of a standardized environment. It is about shifting from a "school at home" mindset to a lifestyle where learning is constant and self-directed.

Igniting the Spark

How to DIY a Substantial Unit Study

Sometimes the most effective curriculum is not something you buy, it is something you craft to fit your homeschooler's specific "spark." Here is how you can curate your own interest-led unit study:

- Select a Substantial Anchor: Every unit needs a backbone, a high-quality, solid resource that provides the core information. Instead of a surface-level article, find a professional-level digital course, a classic "living book," or a series of deep-dive documentaries.

- Bridge the Subjects: Take your homeschooler's core interest and look for the hidden academics within it. If they love interior design, that is your math, your history, and your ELA.

- Curate a Resource Web: Do not rely on just one source, crowdsource from digital archives, podcasts, and expert interviews to create a multi-dimensional view of the topic.

- Define the "Grand Finale": Instead of a standard multiple-choice test, have your homeschooler create a final project that demonstrates true mastery, a digital portfolio, an original research presentation, or a community advocacy project.

- Infuse the Heart: Add daily reflection prompts and a prayer that connects their learning to their character.

Igniting the Spark

If the weight of the "to-do" list feels heavy today, remember that your primary mission is the cultivation of a soul. You are the Culture Creator of your home, and you have full authority to set aside the "standard" way of doing things to better serve your family's specific needs. You decide the tone of your schoolroom, and you have permission to move at the speed of your homeschooler's mastery rather than the pace of a clock. Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is close the laptop early and focus on a conversation that matters more than any academic requirement.

Ultimately, our definition of success is not tied to a state average or a rigid schedule. It is found in a homeschooler who feels secure, is growing in their faith, and knows they are deeply loved. Do not feel the need to recreate an institution at your kitchen table, instead, embrace the freedom of a customized life. When you choose to prioritize connection over curriculum, you aren't just completing a lesson. You are building a sanctuary where your homeschooler's light can finally shine.

Read & Share This Article

Ask a Veteran Homeschooler

Seek out veteran homeschoolers early and ask what they wish they'd known. Keep your supplies simple at first, pencils, paper, and a recycling bin go a long way. The library can supply the majority of your reading and reference material on its own. Simple tools and good advice beat an expensive stockpile every time.

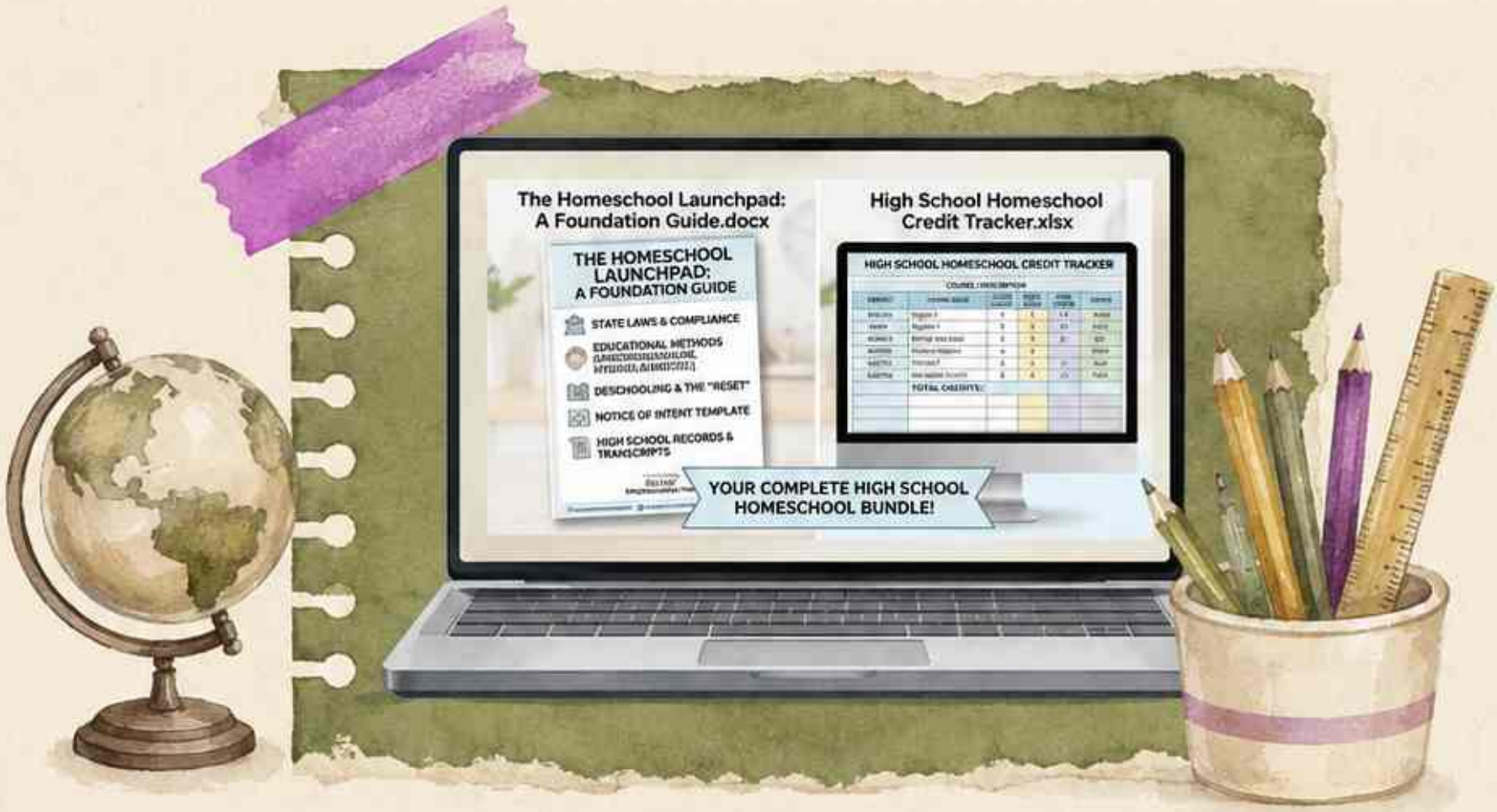
Vicki Johnson

HOMESCHOOL MOM

Big Easy Homeschooling Mom

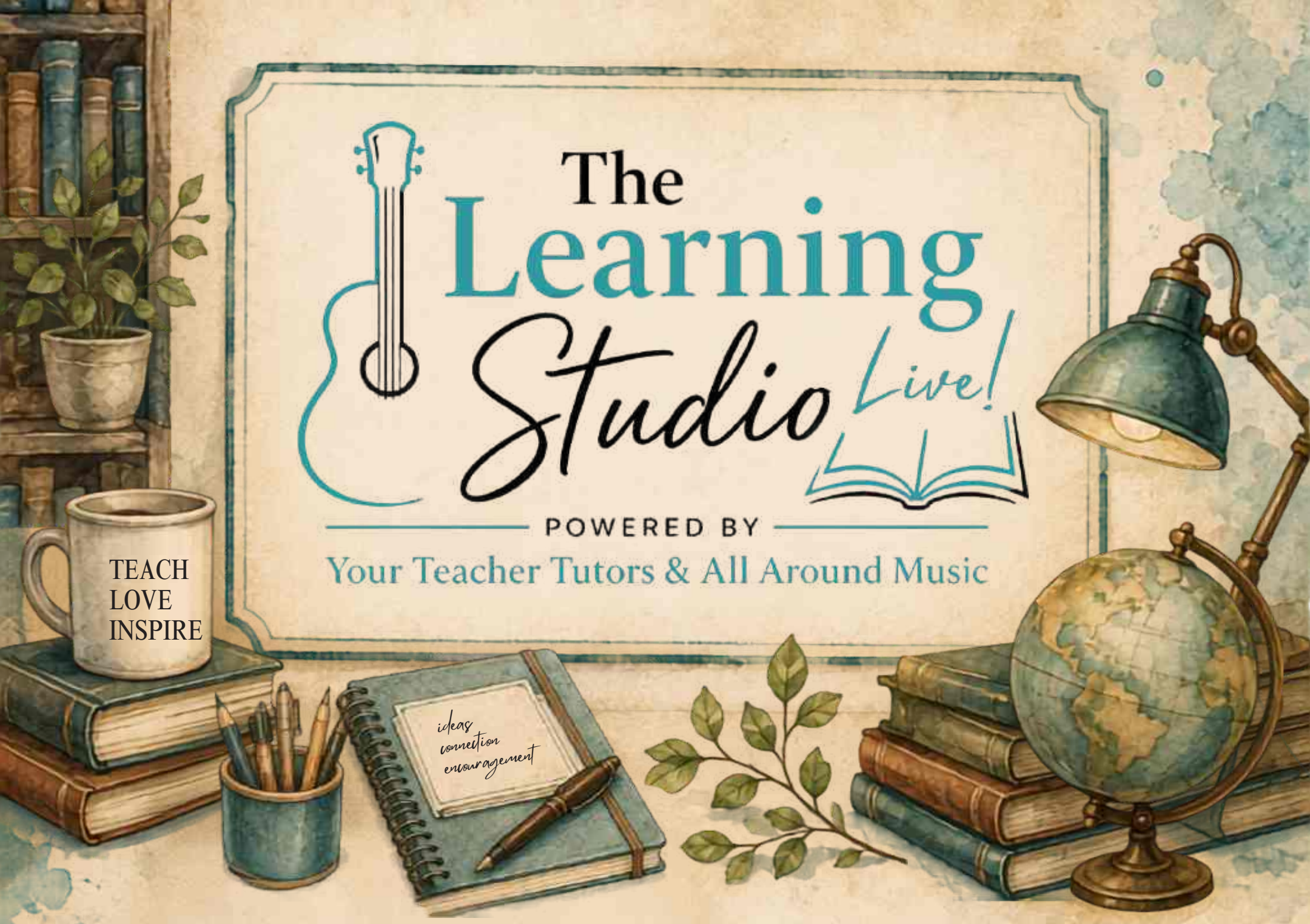
THE HOMESCHOOL LAUNCHPAD GUIDE

A TWO-PART GUIDE TO NAVIGATING HIGH SCHOOL LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND TRANSCRIPTS WITH CONFIDENCE.



This two-part bundle gives you a clear legal roadmap, essential record-keeping guidance, and a four-year credit tracker to simplify the high school journey. It's designed to help homeschool parents confidently navigate state laws, educational methods, and transcript preparation every step of the way.

FREE Download!



The Learning Studio LIVE!

A FREE MONTHLY WORKSHOP WHERE HOMESCHOOL FAMILIES TACKLE COMMON CHALLENGES TOGETHER.

Each month, families join a free, one-hour online workshop built around a common homeschool challenge, not a specific subject. Parents and kids participate together through hands-on activities and discussion, then leave with practical strategies, fresh ideas, and encouragement from other homeschool families facing the same challenges.

Sign up for Free!

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF HOMESCHOOLING

NOBODY WARNS YOU ABOUT

BY COSTA MARAZITA
OF HOMESCHOOLINGJOURNEYS.COM

What families spend beyond curriculum & how to avoid it

The Hidden Costs of Homeschooling

We all start homeschooling with the same kind of excitement. We picture slow mornings, meaningful learning, and finding the perfect curriculum that aligns with our values and what we believe education should look like. For a while, it feels like we're on the right track.

Then something shifts. You start noticing the little things, the extra purchases, and the costs you didn't think about when you were choosing a curriculum. The truth is, the curriculum is only part of the cost. After investing in different homeschool programs, I quickly realized that the real expenses were the ones I hadn't planned for, the ones that kept showing up over and over again.

The Hidden Costs of Homeschooling

We chose digital curricula because they gave us flexibility. I liked being able to piece together lessons from different programs and tailor them to my kids' needs. It felt like the smarter, more affordable option at the time.

What I didn't expect was how quickly printing would become expensive. Worksheets, activity pages, and full units meant we were constantly replacing cartridges, and when you factor in paper and general wear on the printer, the cost adds up faster than you expect. Looking back, I would have printed less and been more intentional about what actually needed to go on paper. Not everything needs to be printed, and sometimes a notebook or whiteboard works just as well.

The Hidden Costs of Homeschooling

Printing isn't the only sneaky expense. Subscriptions build quietly too. You sign up for a reading app because it looks helpful, then add a math platform, and another membership that promises to make things easier. Each one feels manageable on its own, usually around $10 to $20 per month. The problem is how quickly they stack. Before you realize it, you could be spending $50 to $100 a month on subscriptions, many of them barely used.

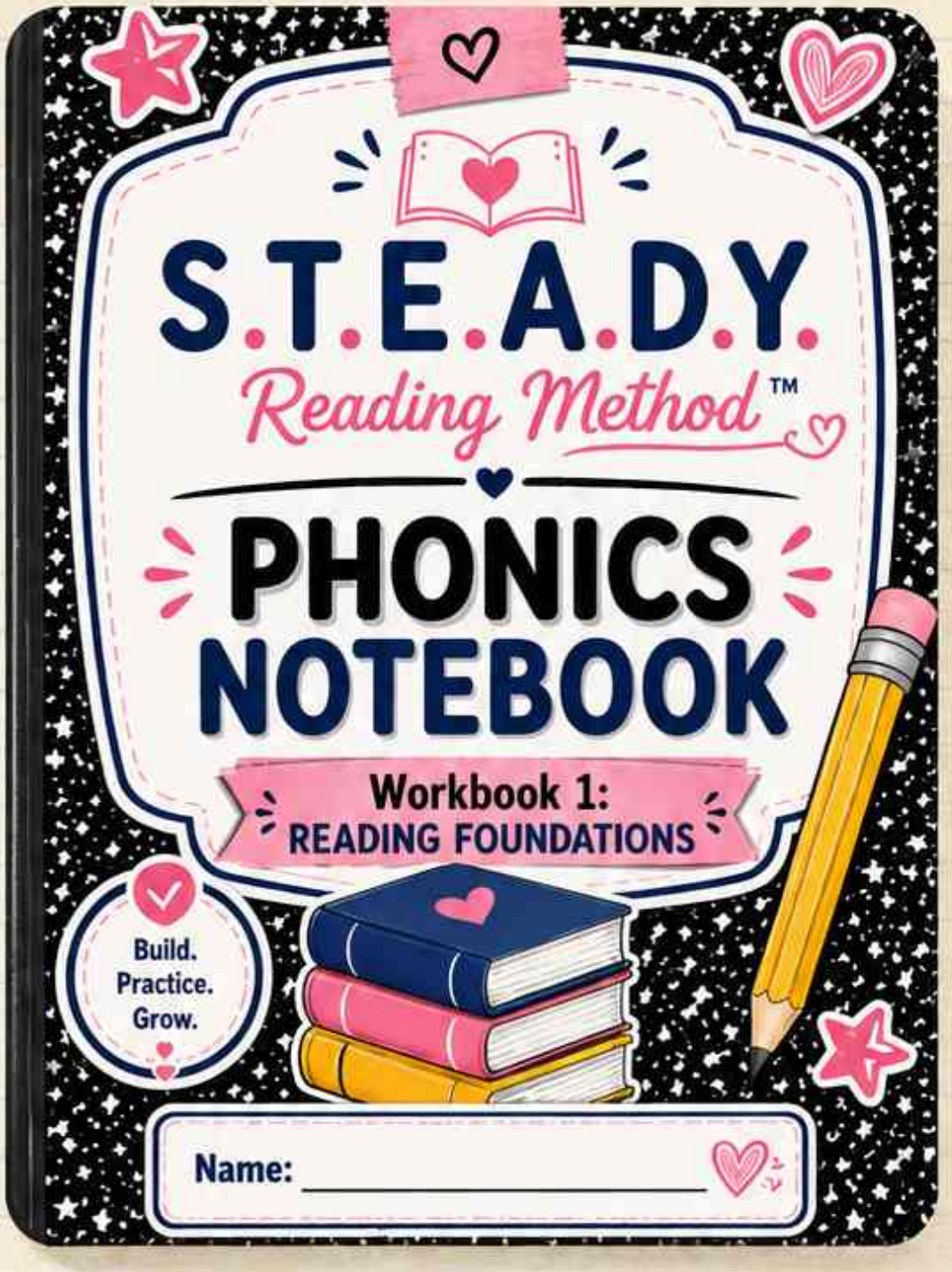
Not every hidden cost shows up in your bank account either. Time is one of the biggest costs, even though it doesn't show up financially. Homeschooling requires planning, organizing, and preparing, and when a curriculum is complicated or requires a lot of prep, it adds stress and takes energy away from actually teaching. Over time, this can lead to burnout.

What families spend beyond curriculum & how to avoid it

The Hidden Costs of Homeschooling

Once you add all of this up, one thing becomes clear. Over time, it becomes clear that more isn't better. What works is having a simple, manageable plan that fits your child and your day. When things feel overwhelming, it's often not because you need more. It's because there is too much. The goal isn't to fill your space with resources. The goal is to create a learning environment that works for your child and still feels manageable for you.

Click here to read more



S.T.E.A.D.Y. READING WORKBOOK 1

Short, structured phonics lessons that build real reading skills, one step at a time.

Workbook 1 of the S.T.E.A.D.Y. Reading Method uses Science of Reading and Orton-Gillingham principles to teach decoding, spelling, and reading confidence. Each lesson takes about 10 to 15 minutes and covers letter-sound correspondence, blending, and CVC words. Built for beginning or struggling readers around ages 5 to 7.

Buy now for $17!

Mix and Match by Child

Find what fits each child in your homeschool. I purchased different curriculum for different subjects and even different kids, and I don't regret it. Mixing approaches works beautifully when you stop trying to make one program fit everyone. Give yourself permission to build a custom solution that actually works.

Heather Temple

HOMESCHOOL MOM

Coloring Pages HQ

BACK TO SCHOOL APPLE COLORING

Free printable apple coloring pages for every age and skill level.

These free printable apple coloring pages are perfect for back to school season. The set includes simple pages for young children, lively designs for older kids, and more detailed pages for advanced colorists, so every child in the family can find one that fits.

FREE Download!

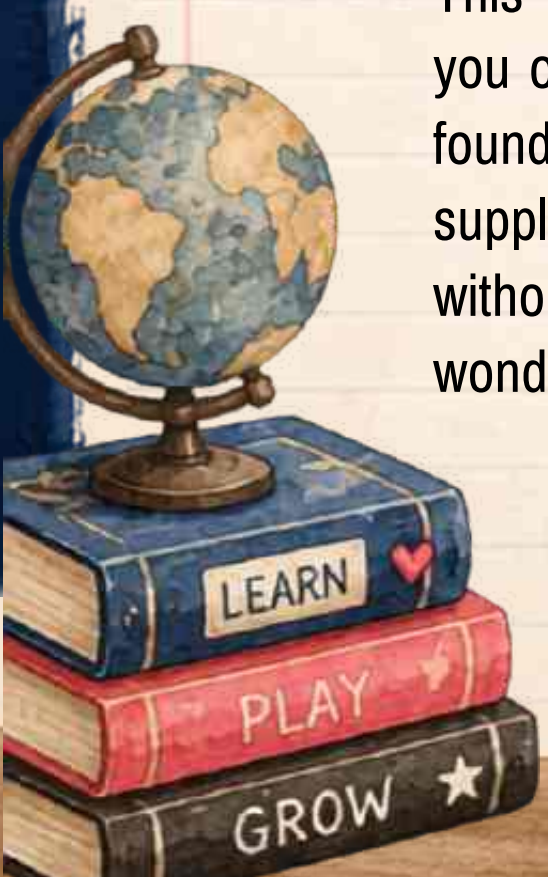
Ready
Set
Learn!

KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM COMPANION

A done-for-you, 9-month plan that fills the gaps in any kindergarten curriculum.

This 9-month, week-by-week curriculum companion gives you over 1,200 pages of activities designed to build a solid foundation for Pre-K and kindergarten learners. Use it to supplement your current curriculum and fill in any gaps, without spending hours searching for extra resources or wondering if you're missing something important.

Buy now for $27!

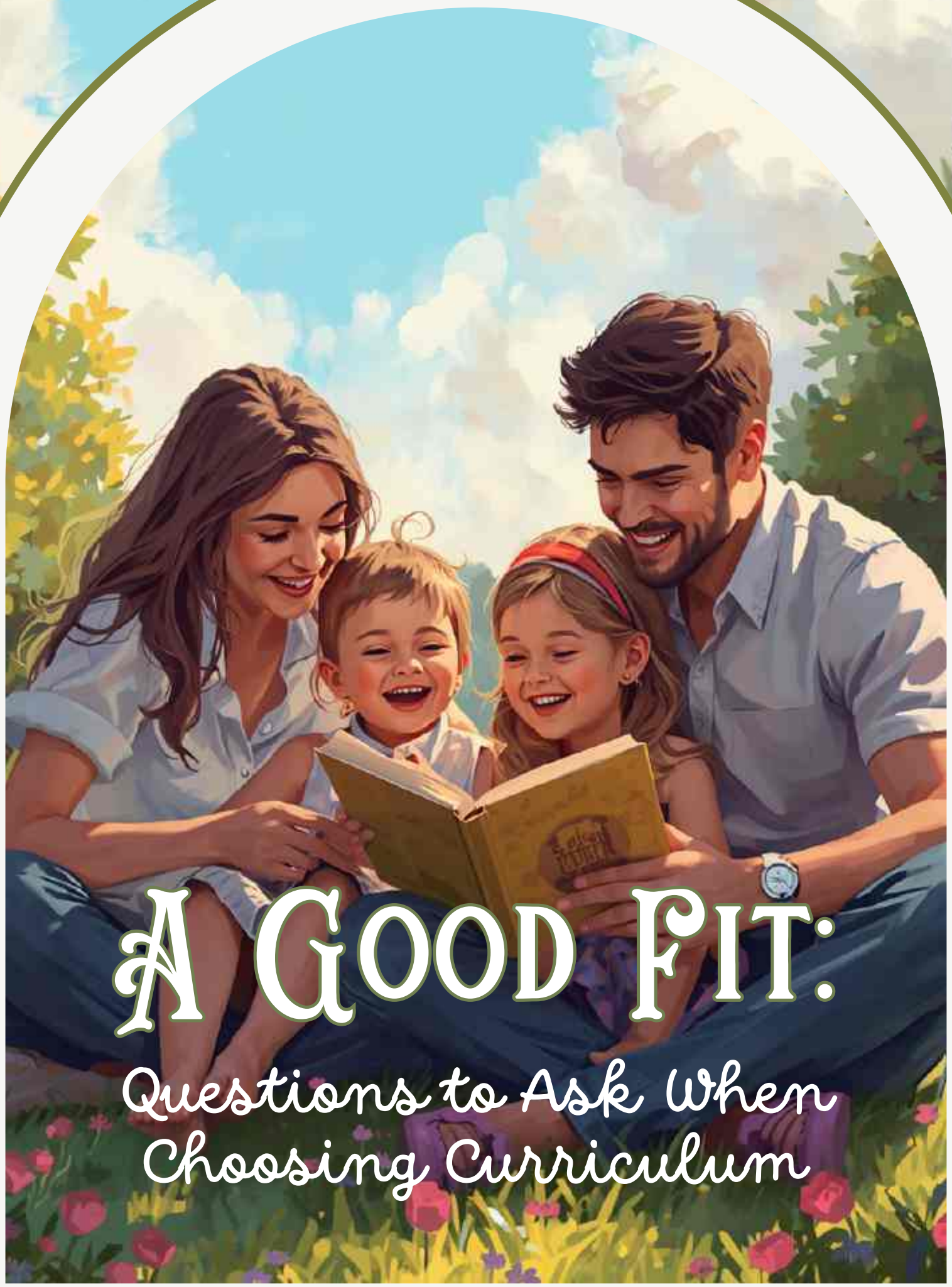


Study Through Art and Music

When you study a time period or location in social studies or geography, learn about the music and art from that era. Create your own version. A trip to the craft store or Walmart for cheap paints, homemade clay, construction paper, YouTube videos and reels for inspiration gives you everything you need.

Cathy Favaro

HOMESCHOOL MOM



A Good Fit:

Questions to Ask When Choosing Curriculum

BY HEATHER SCHWARZ OF
HOMESCHOOL TEACHER TRAINING

A Good Fit:

Questions to Ask When Choosing Curriculum

Most homeschool parents I know (myself included!) have at least one curriculum on the shelf they spent good money on and barely used.

- The program with five-star reviews that you could never quite wrap your mind around.
- The beautiful, exploration-based curriculum that sounded great until your kids complained, "Can't we just watch a video?"
- The one that seemed perfect but turned out to be so complicated and time-consuming that it never got used.

We are fortunate to be homeschooling at a time when there is an abundance of great materials for every budget and learning style, which means there are so many options that it can be hard to choose. I've learned to ask these four questions to help me tell the difference between a resource that worked well for somebody else and one that is a good fit for our unique family.

Questions to Ask When Choosing Curriculum

Is It High Quality?

There is a difference between a good educational resource that will give your child the foundation they need in a subject, and an "educational activity" that keeps them busy today but will be forgotten by tomorrow.
How do you know if a curriculum is high quality? The top factors I look at are who made it and who uses it.

Was the curriculum created by someone who actually knows the subject inside and out? Look for the author's credentials, such as degrees or a career history in the subject and teaching experience at multiple levels. It should be easy to find a summary of what the program covers and in what order (sometimes called the "scope and sequence"), along with a clear explanation of why the author made those choices.

It's also helpful to consider whether the resource has been used successfully by many families like yours. It doesn't have to be the most popular program or the one with the highest ratings. Sometimes a program works really well for a particular type of learner, and if that's your student, it doesn't matter whether it works for everyone else. If you're reading reviews from parents with children who sound just like yours, and they rave about how well it helped their children learn and enjoy the subject, then it could be a good fit for you.

Does It Fit Your Resources?

Don't get sucked into the idea that more expensive means better. There are great resources available at every price point. Decide on a budget before you start researching, and stick to it. If you find yourself falling in love with something outside your budget, make a list of the features you love about it and a list of the bells and whistles you could live without. There is almost always a more affordable way to get the features that matter most to you.

Money isn't the only resource to consider. Do you have space to store and organize everything that comes with the curriculum? Homeschooling resources come in all shapes and sizes, from fully digital to sets with books, manipulatives, and equipment. How much printing will you need to do? How much time will it take to prepare for each lesson, and what supplies will you need? A program you can't afford, don't have space for, or can't make time to prepare is not going to be a good fit, no matter how good it is.

Does It Make Sense to You?

The best way to answer this question is to get your hands on some samples and try teaching a lesson or two. Most publishers offer free samples that you can download, and you may be able to borrow the teacher's guide from a friend or the library.

Working through a sample lesson will give you a sense of how it would feel to use that curriculum day to day. Do you understand the instructions the first time you read them? Can you see how the lessons build on each other? Does the teaching approach match the way you naturally explain things? Can you see how you might adapt the curriculum to fit your schedule, space, multiple children, or other factors?

A curriculum is a tool to help you teach your kids. You're the boss. If you find it confusing or too complicated, keep looking. The best program is the one you can see yourself using, consistently and happily, for a year or more.

Does It Make Sense to Your Child?

While you're looking at those sample lessons, try doing some of the work together with your child. Watch how they respond to the materials and activities.

Children learn in different ways, and their preferences change as they grow. Some focus best when they read or are read to, while others learn more from watching a video. Some like a lot of discussion to help them process, others like to work through written problems on their own. Some need a lot of hands-on activity in every lesson, others find manipulatives distracting and just want to get the work done on paper. Some need more practice problems than the book provides, and others are bored silly by repetition and need less.

None of these preferences are right or wrong. What matters is that the program meets your child where they are right now and helps them move forward in their understanding of the subject.

The Goal Is Consistency

When you've worked through these four questions, you'll often find that the best fit for your family is not the most expensive or the most popular option. What you're looking for is a resource that is solid, affordable, clear to you, and workable for your child. A less popular curriculum that you can use consistently and that gets the job done is worth far more than the "best" curriculum collecting dust on the shelf.

Read & Share This Article

Skip the Perfect Room

You don't need a pretty, aesthetic homeschool room with posters and matching bins. All our daily books and supplies fit in one bag, and we do school on the couch. My so-called homeschool room never gets used. If your child can't sit still at a desk, let them move. Do school in a way that works for your kids.

Sabryna Johnson

HOMESCHOOL MOM

Seeds of Rebellion
Book Bundle

(Signed Book Box Set)

An award-winning historical adventure perfect for family read-alouds and literature-based history study.

Seeds of Rebellion brings Revolutionary Williamsburg to life for readers ages 8 to 14. This signed edition comes straight from veteran homeschool mom Wendy Neugent, along with a custom bookmark and historical stickers. It works well as a family read-aloud or as the spine for a literature-based history unit.

Buy now for $19.99!

More Than *Curriculum.*

Curriculum, academic support, and real community, all in one homeschool program.

FunCation Academy brings your child's curriculum, academic support, and homeschool community together in one place. Get flexible online learning that fits your family, extra help whenever your student needs it, and a virtual campus full of friends and activities. Plans start at just $18 a month.

Start Your Free 7-Day Trial!

What Works for You Works

If an approach doesn't work for you as the parent, it won't work for your children either. If it feels like too much for you, they'll feel overwhelmed too. Your homeschool must fit your family's life and rhythm, not fight against it. Give yourself permission to do things differently.

Colette Ann Sullivan

HOMESCHOOL MOM

Plan Perfect Projects

A simple 4-step planning tool for project-based, child-led homeschool learning.

Plan Perfect Projects walks you through building custom learning projects around your child's interests. You'll keep a running list of project ideas, map out where your child is starting and where they want to end up, plan the steps to get there, and track reflections along the way for your records.

Buy now for $17!

Writing
Without The Struggle

Simple, low-cost ways to build confident writers

BY LORI PRUETT OF ON TRACK SOLUTIONS

Writing Without The Struggle

Do you remember staring at a blank piece of paper, unsure how to get started? It happens to even the best writers. Let's look at some low-cost and no-cost ways to help build independent writers.

The foundation of good writing is knowing what we think. When someone has a hard time getting words down on paper, it often means they do not yet know what they think. I believe the best foundation for writing is having conversations with your children from the beginning. Show them things. Model the description: "Did you see that red truck going so fast?" As they begin to talk, help them to describe things. This type of conversation helps to develop verbal and written expression.

Simple, low-cost ways to build confident writers

Long before handwriting is ready, there's another bridge that works just as well: dictation. Although young children might dabble in writing or copying, their skills will likely be limited. Even when they are too young to write down their own stories, they can narrate or dictate to you. If you read a book together, they can narrate it back to you. If they are learning about sea animals, they can describe the animals to you. You can write it down or type it up as they dictate. It might be possible to use talk-to-text, but it could be challenging with children who are not yet speaking clearly. You could choose to record with audio or video, then type or write it up later.

Writing Without The Struggle

For years, I frequently encouraged my children to dictate to me. I wanted them to think composition was as natural as any other play. As they were able and interested, they illustrated their dictated writing. I invested in plenty of paper, a sturdy 3-hole puncher, and binders to store their writing. They loved looking at the "book" they were writing. As their handwriting improved, they copied their dictated writing. It was good copy work practice. Because it was their own composition, it planted the seed that they were writers.

Writing Without The Struggle

Before children jump directly into writing their own compositions, there is a helpful transition that many people skip. As simple as it sounds, making lists is an excellent transition that requires organizational and thinking skills, but does not require wrapping the structure of language and the mechanics of punctuation around the words just yet. Young children often love to collect things. They could start by listing the items collected. You could begin by making the list for them to copy. Later, they can do it on their own. Add other lists: a grocery list, a list of favorite colors or foods, and so on. When they can do it easily, you can uplevel the lists. Take two minutes a day to list everything they can think of about trains or words describing ice cream. Be creative and follow their interests.

Click here to read more

On Track Solutions

Homeschool Success Bundle

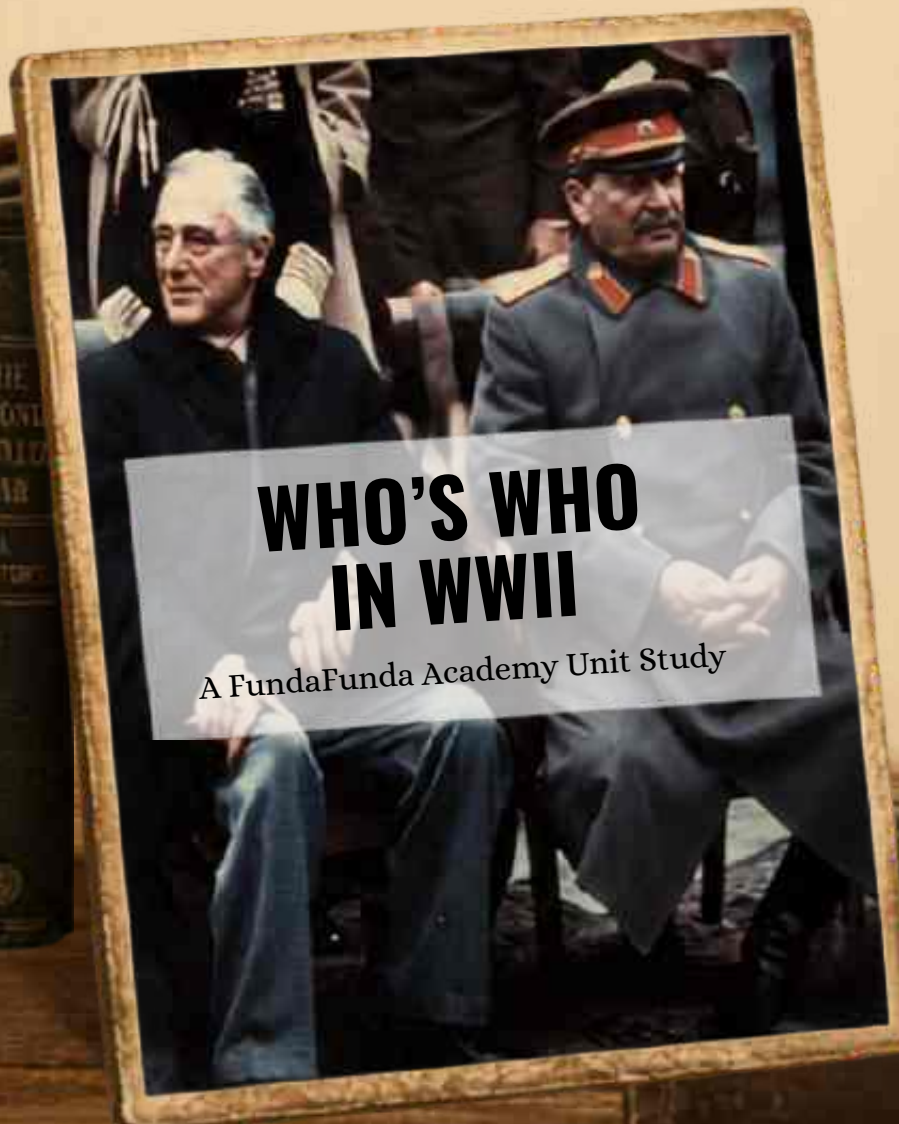
Practical tools to plan high school with less stress and more confidence.

This bundle brings together tools to help you track learning, calm the daily chaos, and plan a clear path through high school toward college or career. It also includes bonus videos with practical ways to cut stress and enjoy the process, so homeschooling feels manageable instead of overwhelming.

Buy now for $19.97!

WHO`S WHO IN WORLD WAR 2

AN INTERACTIVE, WEB-BASED HISTORY STUDY FOCUSED ON THE PEOPLE WHO SHAPED WORLD WAR 2.



This unit study puts the people of World War 2 at the center of the lesson. Delivered through an interactive, web-based format, it walks students through the key figures who shaped the war, helping them understand history through real stories, not just dates and battles.

Buy now for $20!

Every Child Learns Differently

Every child does not learn the same. You may need different curriculum for different subjects or different children. Some approaches work beautifully for one child and completely fail with another. It's okay to pause, step back, and regroup when something isn't working. Flexibility and adaptation are the true strengths of homeschooling.

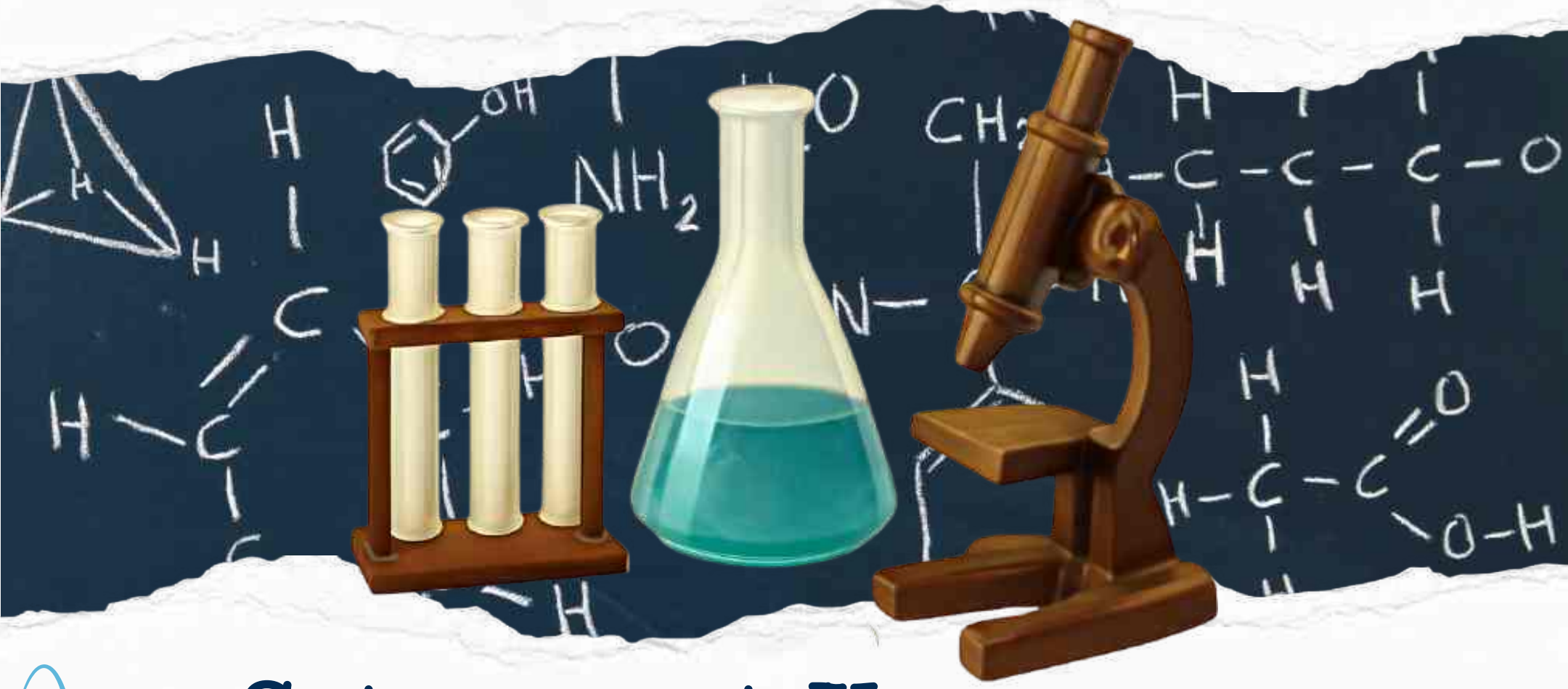
Mandi Hancock
HOMESCHOOL MOM

Science at Home

Turning Everyday Items into Real Experiments

BY ASHLEY RUEDY OF ASHLEYRUEDY.COM

Turning Everyday Items into Real Experiments



Science at Home

When you think about science experiments, it's easy to picture expensive kits, complicated instructions, and a lot of prep work. That's exactly what I thought too, especially in our first year of homeschooling.

I found myself buying those boxed science kits, hoping they would make learning more fun and engaging. But over time, I realized something surprising: most of those experiments were using simple household ingredients I already had in my kitchen. That completely changed the way we approached science in our home.

The truth is, you don't need fancy equipment or a big budget to create meaningful, hands-on science experiences. Some of the best learning happens with everyday items, recycled materials, and even right outside in your backyard.

Turning Everyday Items into Real Experiments

Science at Home

You don't need fancy equipment or a science lab to create meaningful learning experiences at home. In fact, your kitchen already has everything you need.

Simple, everyday tools like measuring cups, spoons, and jars can easily double as science tools. Measuring cups turn into a fun way to explore both math and science. Jars become observation containers for experiments or nature finds. Even basic kitchen spoons are perfect for mixing, scooping, and experimenting.

When we stop focusing on having all the "right" supplies, it takes the pressure off and makes learning feel more natural for both you and your child. One easy way to keep that confidence going is to have everything ready before your child even asks.

Turning Everyday Items into Real Experiments

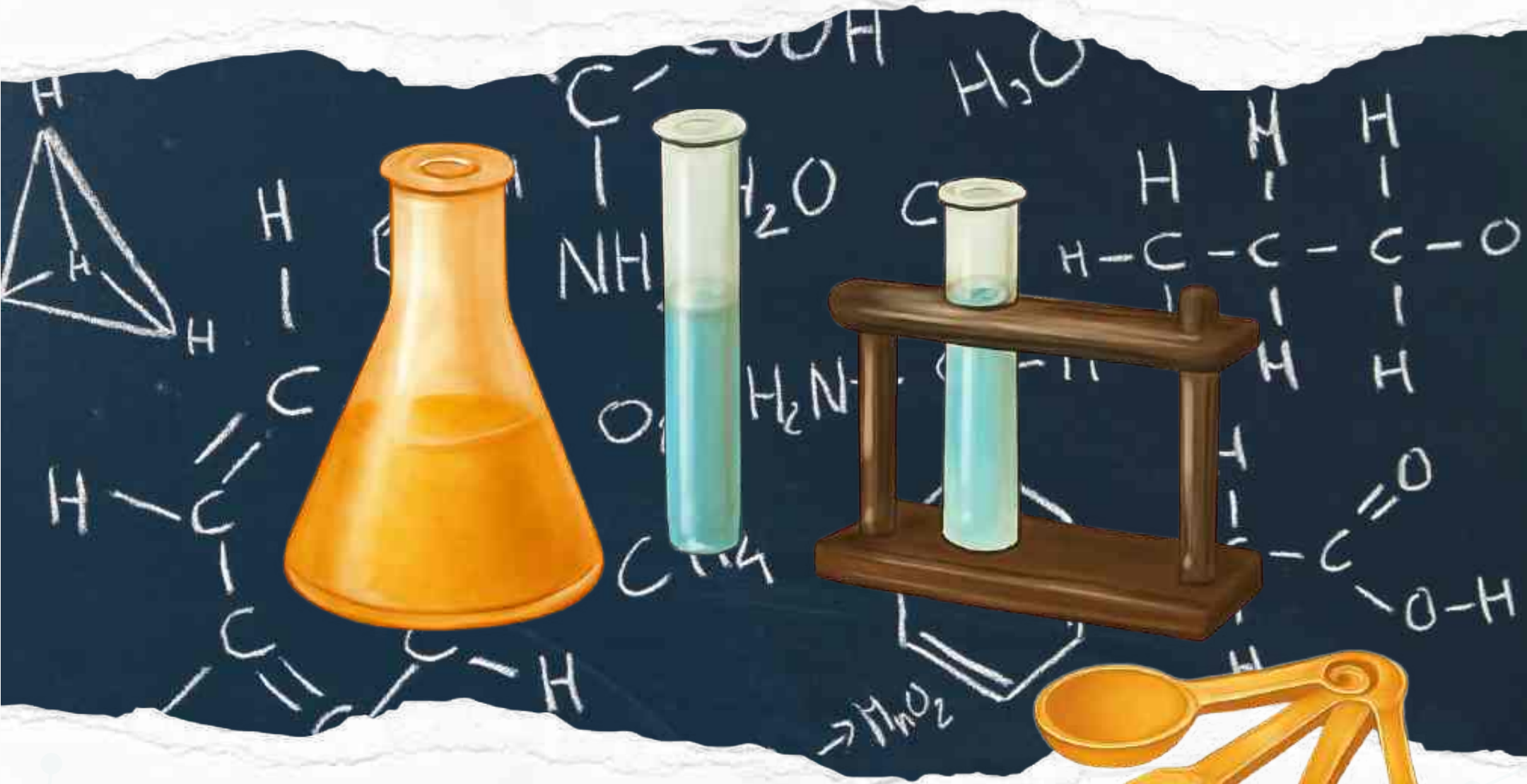
Science at Home

One of the easiest ways to encourage hands-on learning at home is to make it simple to say "yes" to it, and having a designated science experiment tub does exactly that.

Set aside a container filled with safe, everyday ingredients like baking soda, salt, and baking powder. Then add a few simple tools: measuring cups and spoons, stirring utensils, droppers, and reusable containers.

Having everything in one place allows your children to explore more independently, without needing constant setup or supervision. Instead of saying, "Sorry, we can't do that, I need to save this," you're able to confidently say, "Yes, go ahead and try it." That simple shift opens the door to more curiosity, creativity, and learning.

Turning Everyday Items into Real Experiments



Science at Home

Science doesn't have to be complicated to be meaningful. You don't need a perfectly planned lesson, expensive supplies, or a full science lab to help your child learn and explore. A few simple ingredients, some everyday tools, and a willingness to let your kids get curious are enough to create powerful learning moments right at home.

They build curiosity, spark creativity, and help your child actually understand what they're learning. If you've ever felt like you needed "more" to teach science well, you don't. You already have enough. Start small, keep it simple, and watch how learning comes to life in ways you didn't expect.

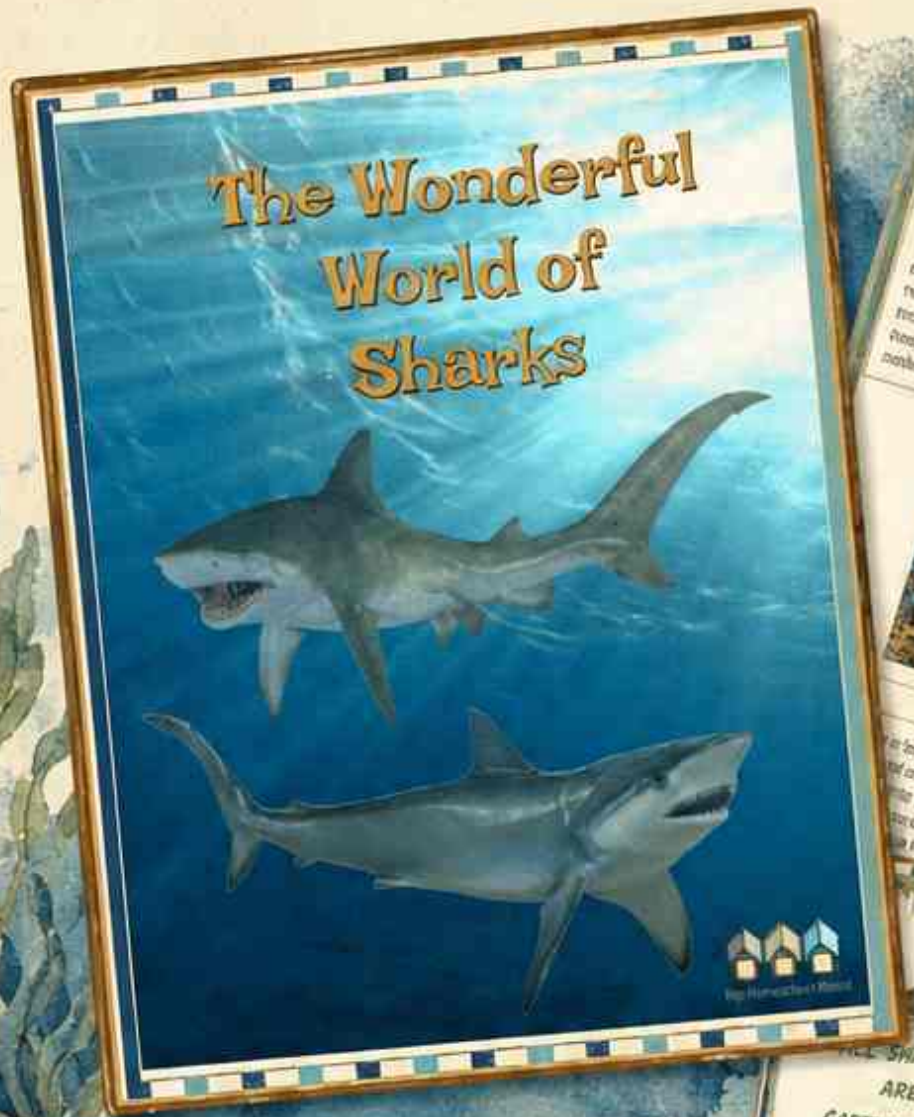
Click here to read more

Kids Earn Their Extras

Estimate what you'll need for the year, divide it by twelve, and set that amount aside each month. Reuse materials whenever you can. For extracurriculars, have your kids earn their own money through chores like raking, mowing, shoveling, dog walking, or babysitting. It teaches responsibility and takes pressure off your budget.

Shannon Neiswonger Acevedo
HOMESCHOOL MOM

HIP HOMESCHOOL MOMS



Wonderful World of Sharks

20-PAGE SHARK WORKBOOK COVERING ANATOMY, HABITAT, AND BEHAVIOR IN ONE FUN UNIT.

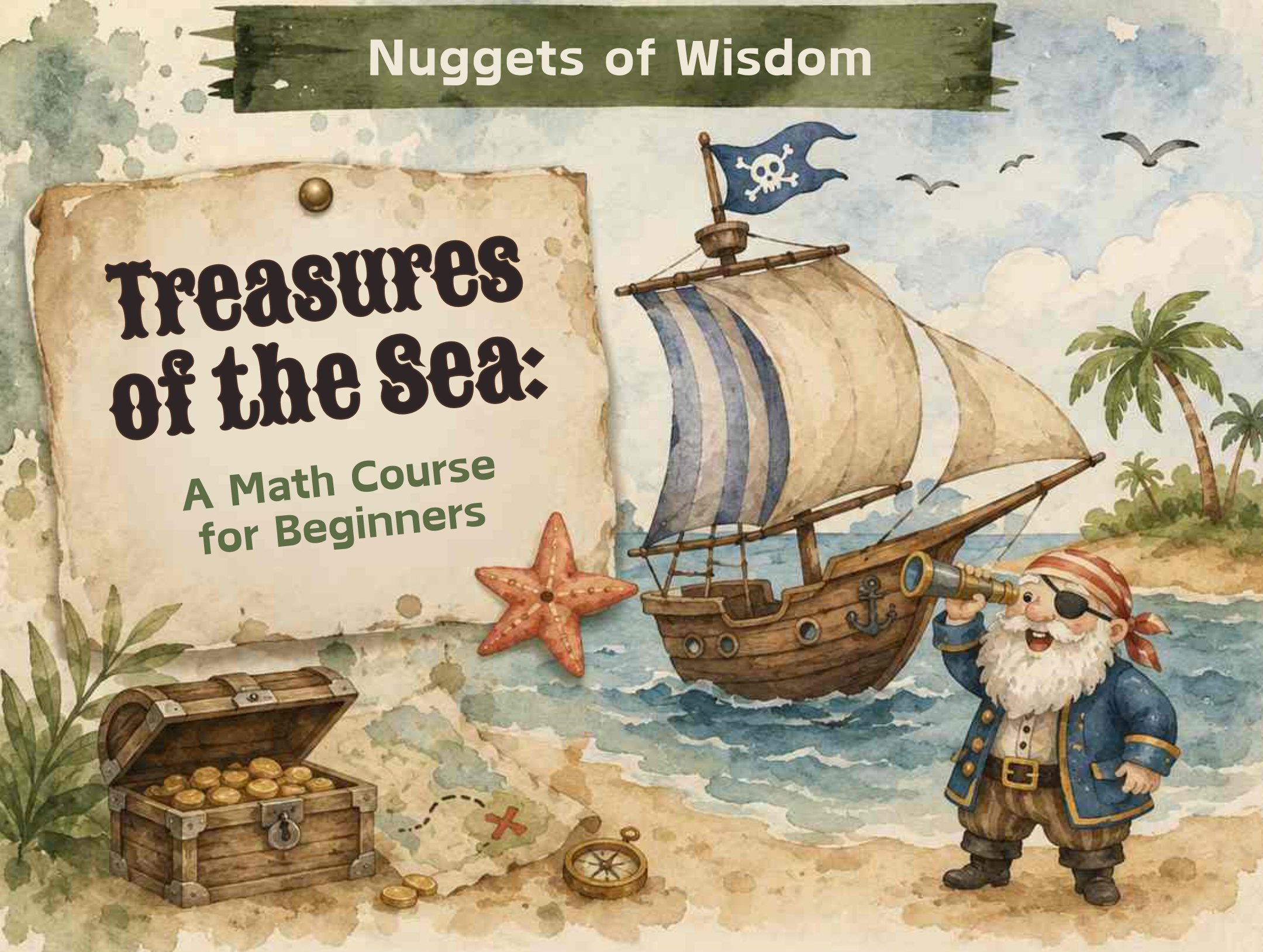
This 20-page digital workbook covers shark anatomy, habitat, and behavior through colorful illustrations, fill-in pages, crosswords, and diagrams. Kids complete fun activities like labeling charts and writing short opinions about what they learn, making it an easy addition to any science routine, especially during Shark Week.

Buy now for $11.99!

Nuggets of Wisdom

Treasures of the Sea:

A Math Course for Beginners



Pirates & Oceans Kindergarten Math

A pirate-themed math resource that makes kindergarten practice feel like treasure hunting.

Turn math practice into a pirate adventure on the high seas. This kindergarten resource uses colorful, ocean-themed activities to build number sense, counting, and early math skills your child will actually want to practice. Designed for homeschool use, it keeps learning meaningful without feeling like more schoolwork.

Buy now for $29.99

193 Little Adventures

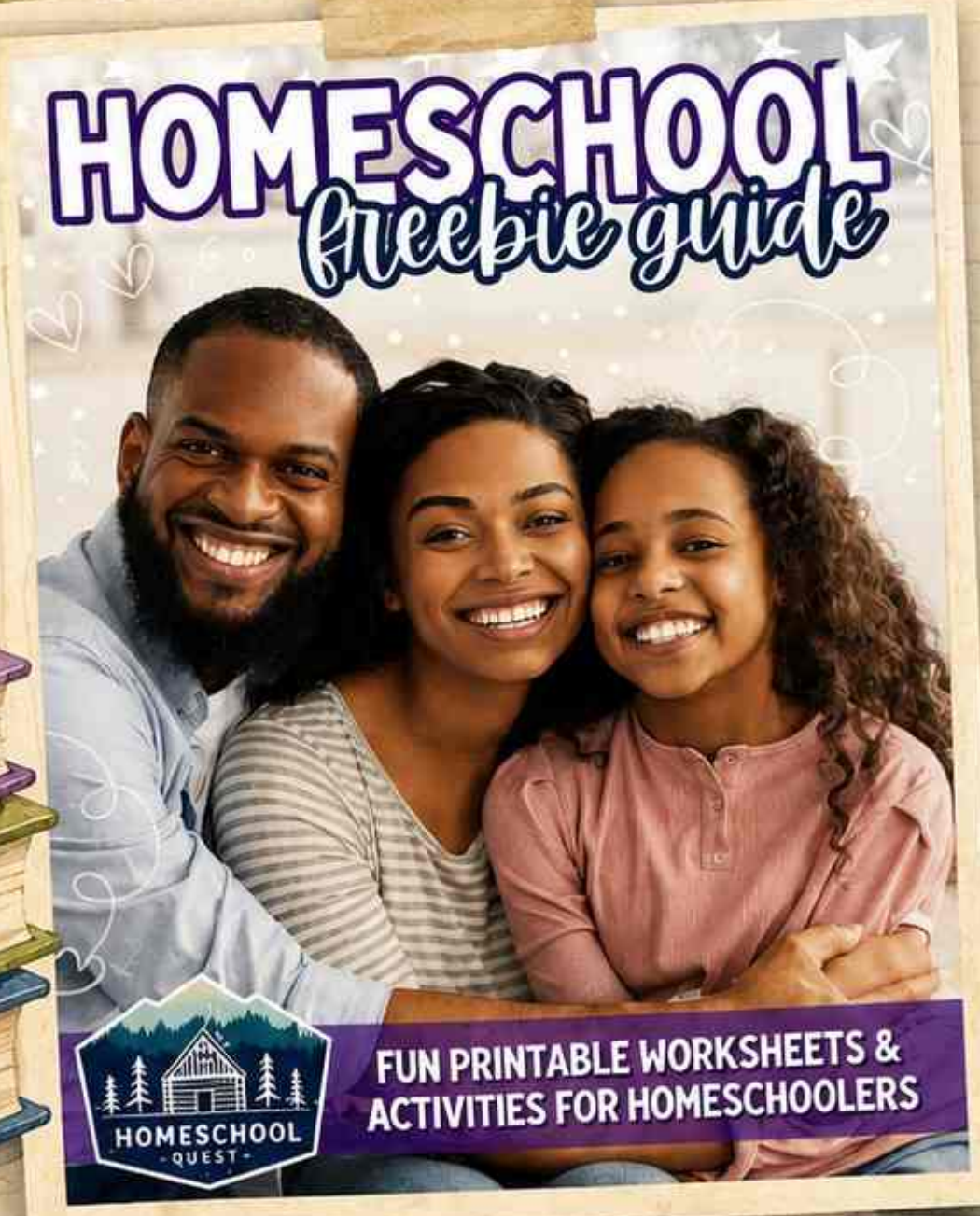
Edinburgh Virtual Field Trip

A free 60-page tour that brings Scotland's capital right to your

This free 60-page printable takes your kids on a curiosity-led tour of Edinburgh without leaving home. Hana the Research Ninja and Diego the Culinary Explorer guide children through castle legends, a simple Scottish recipe, and hands-on Montessori-style activities. Built for independent exploration.

FREE DOWNLOAD!

HOMESCHOOL freebie guide



1,100+ FREEBIES!

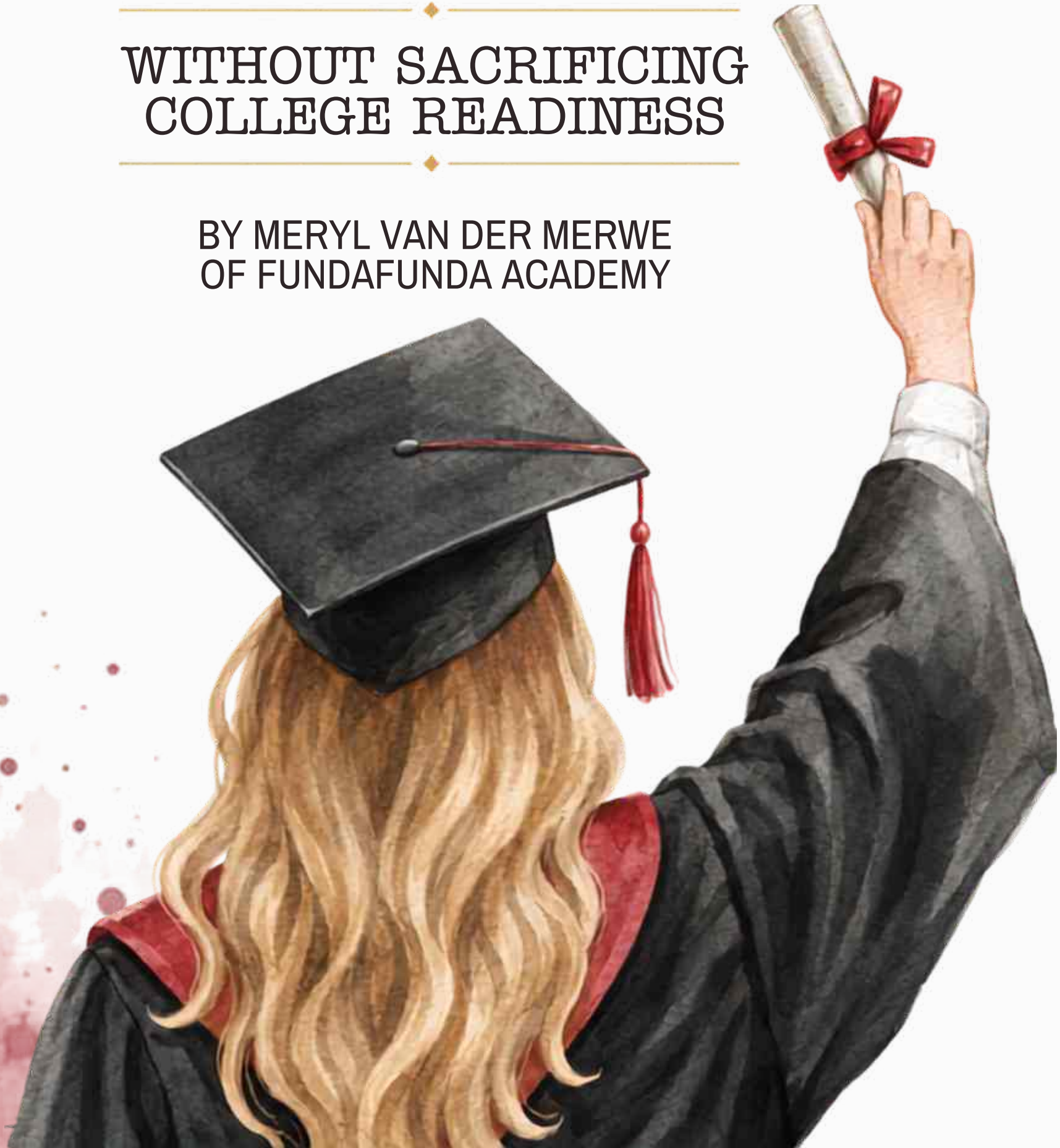
Sign-up for our newsletter and get our awesome freebie guide!

Get the Freebie Guide!

SPENDING LESS ON CURRICULUM

WITHOUT SACRIFICING COLLEGE READINESS

BY MERYL VAN DER MERWE
OF FUNDAFUNDA ACADEMY



SPENDING LESS ON CURRICULUM

We started homeschooling after moving to the U.S. from South Africa. At one point, I was homeschooling four children ranging in age from preschool to teenage, all on a single income. I wasn't bringing in any money initially, and even later, when I began teaching at a co-op, it wasn't much.

At the same time, my children had big goals. They weren't just thinking about college, they were aiming for competitive universities. I knew they needed a rigorous education to both get in and succeed once there. The problem was obvious: I couldn't buy everything that looked amazing. But I also didn't want gaps in their education, and I wanted them to enjoy learning. That forced me to become very intentional about every curriculum decision.

SPENDING LESS ON CURRICULUM

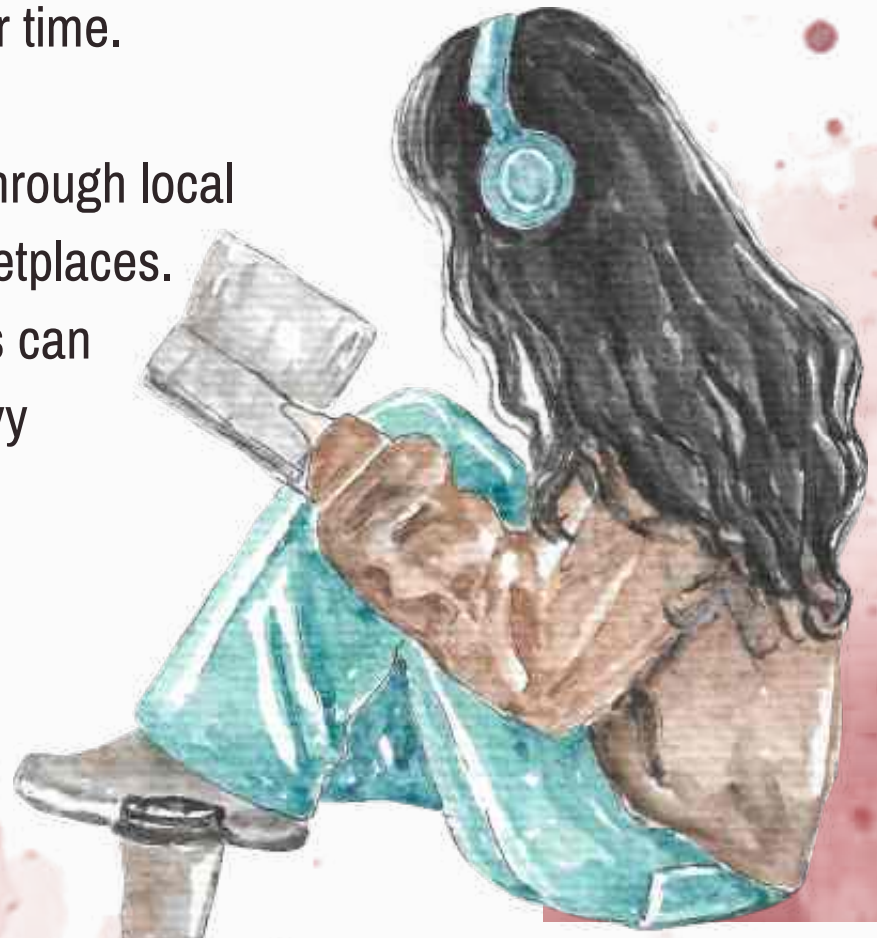
At first, I assumed I needed a full curriculum for every subject. It didn't take long to realize that wasn't necessary, or even the best way to do it.

Each of my children had different strengths and interests. I began focusing more on the subjects they were likely to pursue further, making sure they had strong foundations in those areas. I came to see that spending less mostly came down to prioritizing where money would make the biggest difference, not cutting things out. Once I knew where to prioritize, the next step was finding ways to save everywhere else.

Saving money mostly came down to being strategic about where it went, not lowering quality.

Whenever possible, I chose non-consumable materials. Whether it was books or self-paced courses, being able to reuse them with multiple children made a significant difference over time.

Used curriculum is also widely available through local sales, Facebook groups, and online marketplaces. It takes more effort to find, but the savings can be substantial, especially for content-heavy subjects. At one point, I even swapped curriculum with a friend who was using the same program at a different level.



SPENDING LESS ON CURRICULUM

The library became one of our most valuable resources. I often purchased the curriculum guide but borrowed the required books. Libraries also offer documentaries, foreign language resources, and online courses.

Some of the most meaningful learning came from electives I created myself. One child studied meteorology, another linguistics, and another game theory. I combined secondhand books, free online resources, and projects to build half-credit courses tailored to their interests.

SPENDING LESS ON CURRICULUM

Those strategies added up fast. Spending less on curriculum did require more time. I had to research carefully and think through each purchase. I didn't always get it right the first time, but being intentional forced me to focus on what truly mattered.

As a result, my children were well prepared. They were all accepted into competitive universities, took AP exams without formal AP classes, earned strong ACT and SAT scores, received scholarships, and succeeded in college. My oldest daughter now has a PhD and lectures at a university in the Netherlands. Homeschooling high school for college-bound students on a budget is absolutely possible. It just takes spending wisely instead of spending more.

Click here to read more

One Subject at a Time

When you're starting out, tackle one subject at a time instead of trying to figure out five subjects at once. It saves money, time, and frustration. Remember that a curriculum is just a guide, one possible way to teach something. You don't have to follow its schedule exactly. You're the one in charge, not the material.

Shawna Theobald

HOMESCHOOL MOM

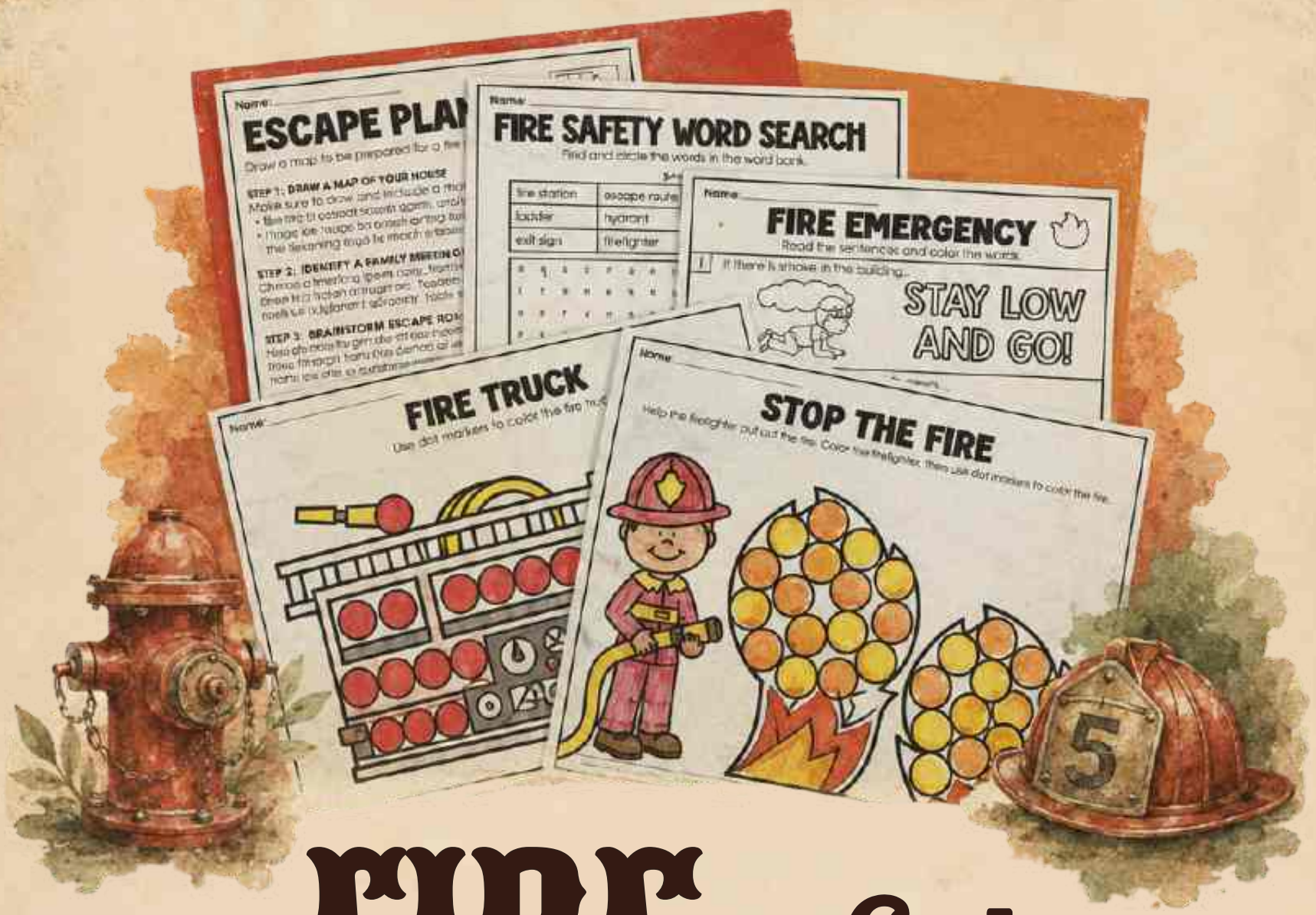
Monthly Reading Log Tracker

A SIMPLE, INDEPENDENT WAY FOR KIDS TO TRACK THEIR READING ALL MONTH LONG.

This monthly reading log helps motivate kids to read by letting them track their own progress. Each day they read, they color in an object on the page, no help needed. Optional charts let you record book titles and details for your homeschool portfolio at the end of the year.

Buy now for $11.95!

CREATED BY FARMING MOM



FIRE safety worksheets for kids

Free worksheets and coloring pages that teach kids to stop, drop, and stay low.

These free worksheets and coloring pages teach kids real fire safety skills: mapping two escape routes, picking a family meeting spot, and practicing Stop, Drop, and Roll along with Stay Low and Go.

FREE DOWNLOAD!

FOREST ANIMAL DETECTIVES

FAMILY LEARNING QUEST

Unleash 250+ pages of nature-filled adventure with Forest Animal Detectives. Track animals, crack mysteries, and learn together as a family, saving you time while making memories.

Buy now for $15

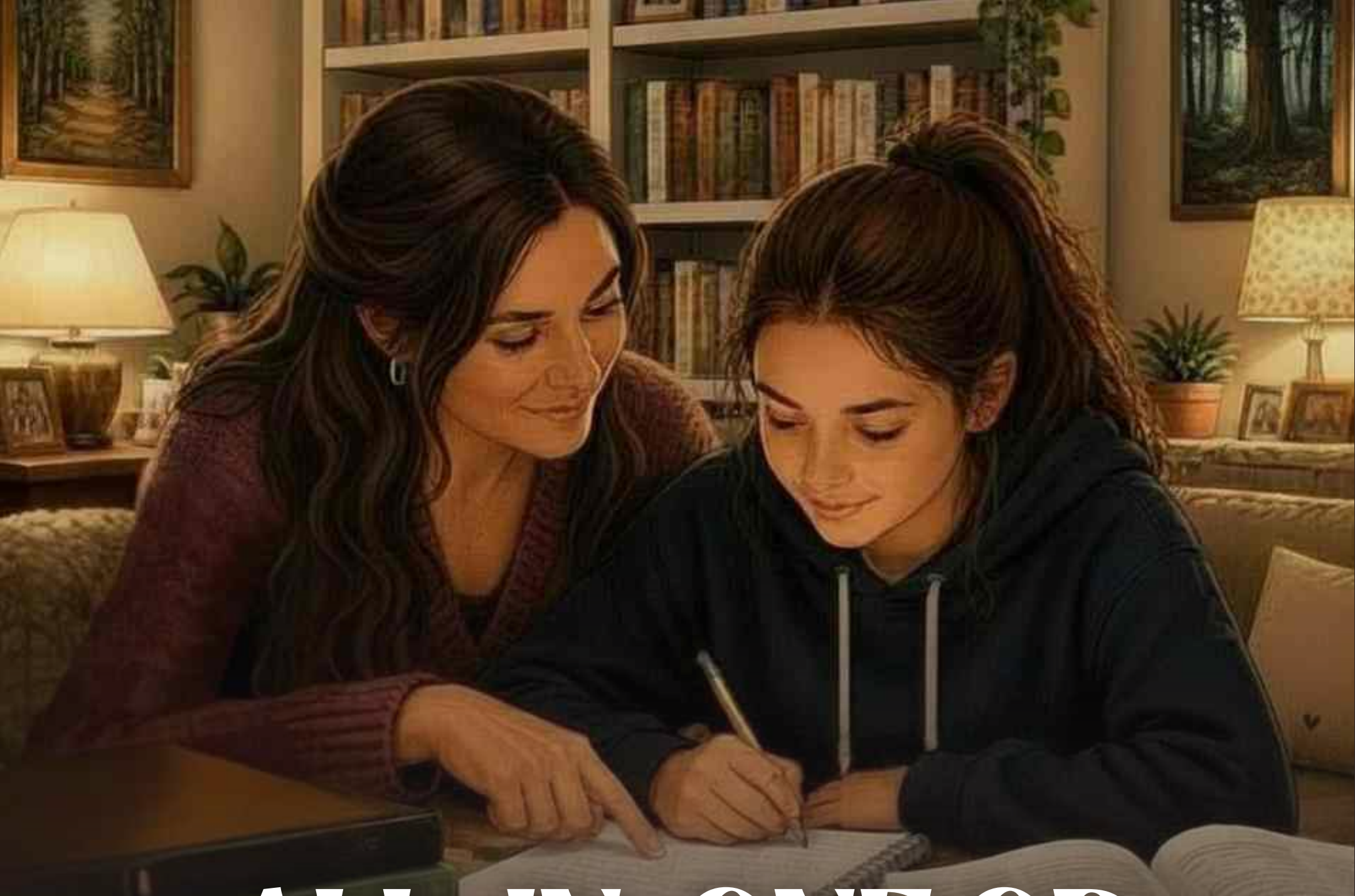
TRACING LINES

PRE-WRITING PRACTICE

A PRINT-AND-GO WORKSHEET THAT BUILDS PENCIL CONTROL BEFORE HANDWRITING BEGINS.

This print-and-go worksheet helps young learners strengthen pencil control and hand-eye coordination through straight, curved, and zigzag lines. It gives PreK and kindergarten students focused practice before they move on to writing letters and numbers.

FREE DOWNLOAD!

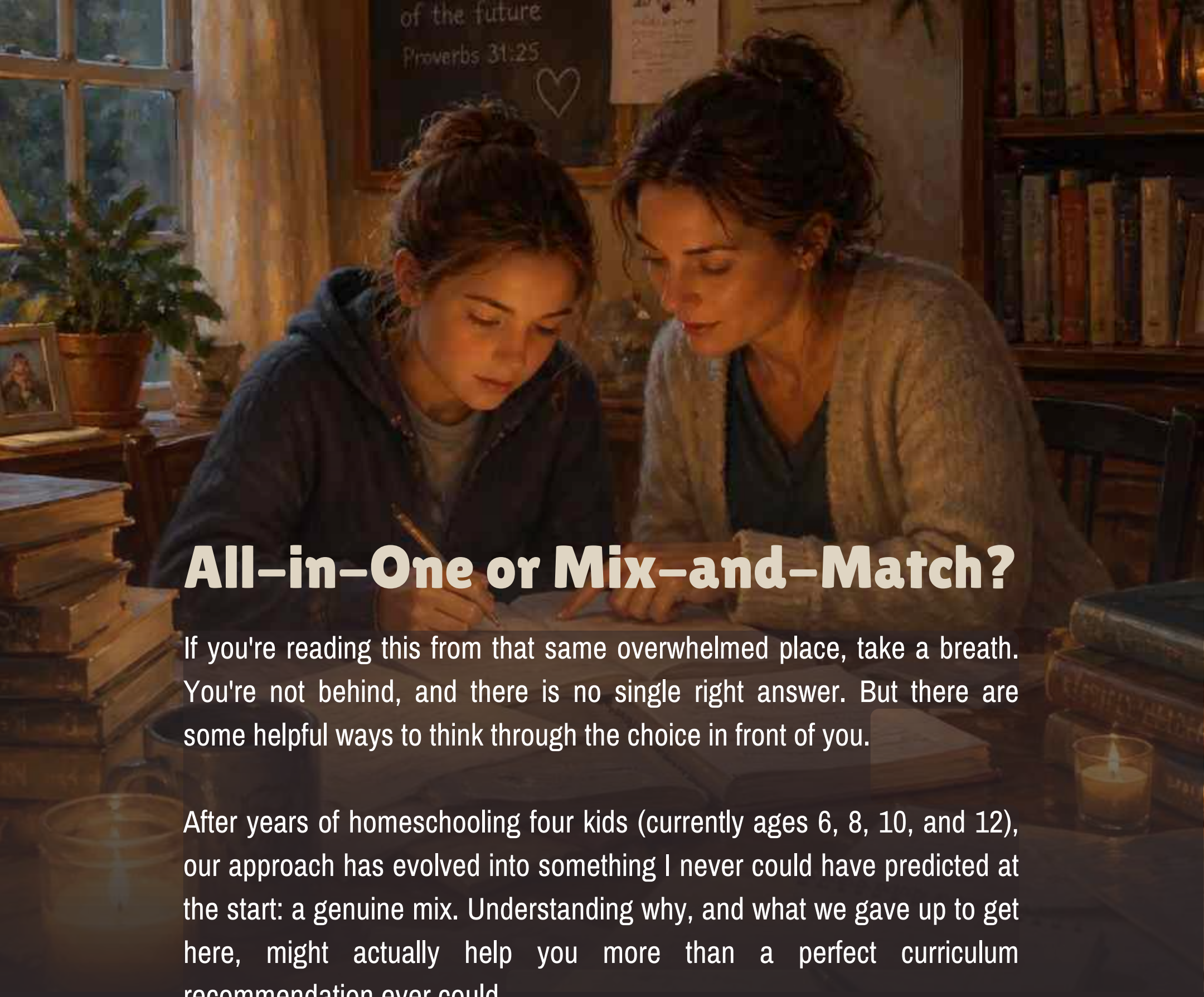


ALL-IN-ONE OR Mix-and-Match?

A Real Homeschool Family's Honest Take

When I was brand new to homeschooling, I did what many of us probably did: headed to YouTube and searched "how to homeschool." I watched so many videos and found the aesthetic homeschoolers, the Montessori folks, the Charlotte Mason fans, and more. I still felt lost, but at least I was lost with an idea of what some other people were doing.

BY MELISSA MUIR OF CURIO



All-in-One or Mix-and-Match?

If you're reading this from that same overwhelmed place, take a breath. You're not behind, and there is no single right answer. But there are some helpful ways to think through the choice in front of you.

After years of homeschooling four kids (currently ages 6, 8, 10, and 12), our approach has evolved into something I never could have predicted at the start: a genuine mix. Understanding why, and what we gave up to get here, might actually help you more than a perfect curriculum recommendation ever could.

Let's be real: starting homeschool is hard. You're not just teaching, you're also becoming your own school administrator, curriculum director, and scheduler. An all-in-one curriculum removes decision fatigue from the equation, which is genuinely helpful when you're still figuring out how to do this. Over time, we started noticing what wasn't working, and that's when things began to shift.

All-in-One or Mix-and-Match?

In our home, we use Horizons for math because it's structured, incremental, and our kids genuinely feel successful with it. We use The Good and the Beautiful for language arts because it's beautifully presented and literature-rich without being overwhelming. Nearpod handles our science and social studies in an interactive, tech-friendly way the kids actually look forward to. Music is a whole family affair too: Hoffman Academy, YouTube tutorials, and a lot of patient practice on piano, guitar, ukulele, mandolin, and drums.

All-in-One or Mix-and-Match?

None of this happened overnight, and it's still evolving. If you're just getting started, here's my honest advice: begin with more structure, and loosen as you learn.

If you're in your first year, there is no shame in choosing a complete curriculum that does the planning for you. Get your sea legs. Learn what your kids respond to. Then, as you gain confidence, you'll naturally start to notice what needs to change. That's your cue to swap something in. The best curriculum is the one your kids will actually engage with, in a structure you can actually sustain. Start there, and trust that you'll find your footing, because you will.

Click here to read more

Skip the Grade Level Box

Ignore the grade levels on curriculum boxes. Focus on what your child can do right now. Prioritize math and reading when young. Science is play and exploration. Tools like interactive globes teach geography and social studies during natural play. Follow their interests even if they're ahead or behind.

Rachel Craven Wicker

HOMESCHOOL MOM

★ My Speech and Debate Coach ★

Homeschool Debate Club

Grow critical thinking, communication, and confidence.

Join a debate club taught by champion coaches and trusted by over 15,000 learners.

Kids explore a new topic every week in this award-winning, best in class program, with no commitment required. It's a great fit for the kid who loves to talk but needs help organizing their thoughts, and just as great for the kid who needs a nudge to speak up in a group. Every debater walks away thinking sharper and standing taller.

★ Join the Wait List! ★

FundaFunda Academy

States of Matter Mini Unit

A hands-on, web-based science unit that brings solids, liquids, and gases to life.

Explore solids, liquids, and gases in this web-based mini unit study designed for grades 4 through 8. Through videos, games, interactive websites, and hands-on experiments, students discover the states of matter in action. About one week of content, with lifetime access included.

FREE Download!

Let Arts & Crafts Bloom Naturally

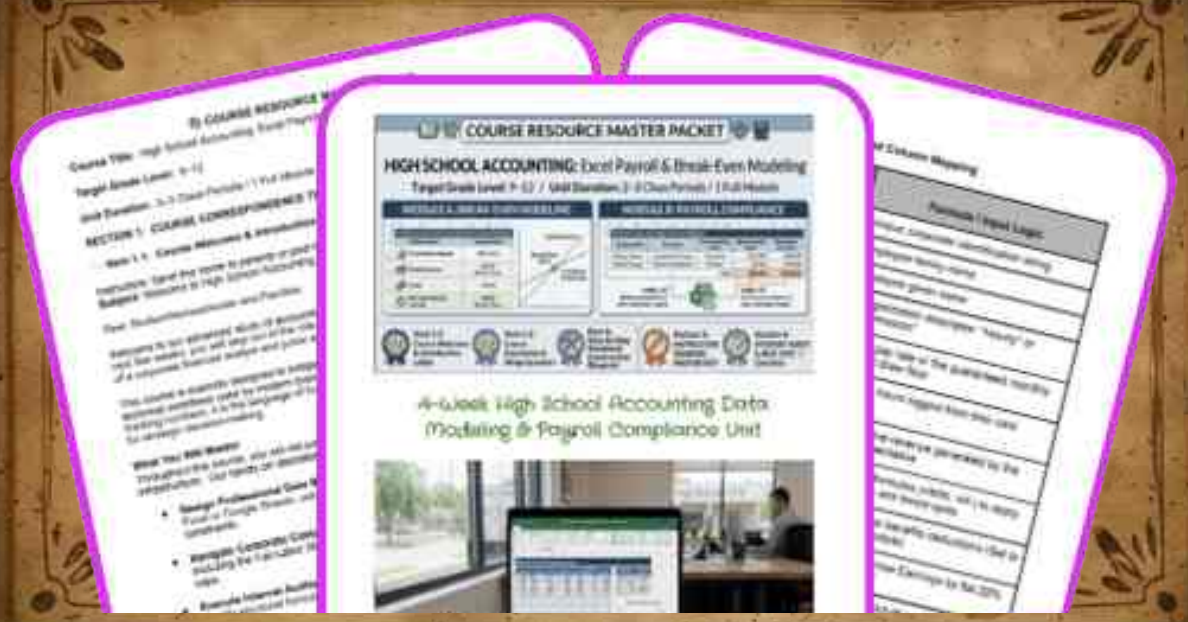
Think outside the school box with arts and crafts. They don't need to be parent-led. Kids naturally love to create. Give them cheap sketch pads and let them fill them with their own imagination. YouTube videos help when they want instruction, or they'll ask you. When interest strikes, create together.

Tiffany Scott

HOMESCHOOL MOM

Tide Wind Academy Homeschool

High School Accounting & Payroll Unit



A hands-on business unit that teaches real accounting skills for a strong high school transcript.

This 4-week project walks your teen through real accounting and payroll work, including spreadsheet design, sales commissions, and overtime rules. It comes with a full slide presentation, student lab packets, self-correcting formula challenges, and a grading rubric, so it's ready to use for a high school business elective.

Buy now for $19.99!

Tide Wind Academy Homeschool

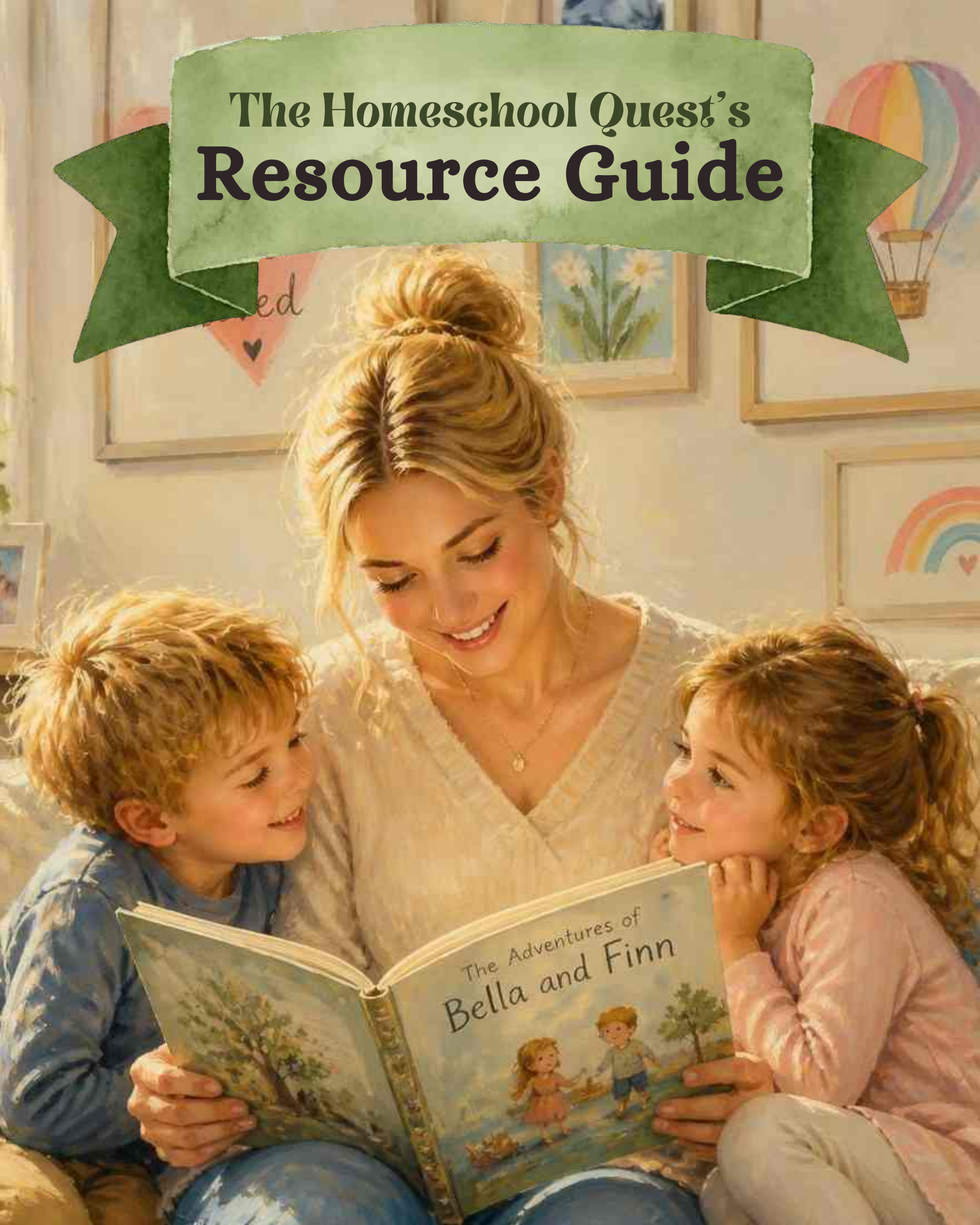
Crime and Innovation Bundle

Three reading-based resources exploring forensic science, cybercrime, and cold case breakthroughs.

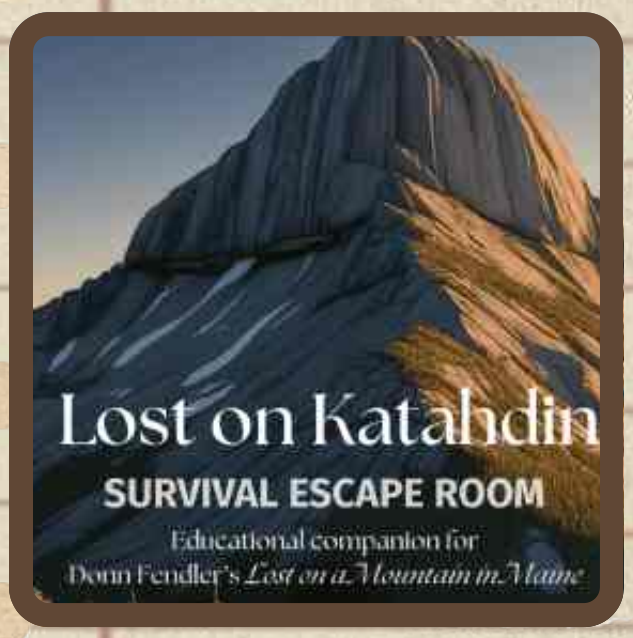
This bundle includes three reading passages covering the history of forensic science, modern cybercrime, and cold cases solved through DNA and digital forensics. Each resource comes with 20 analytical questions, an answer key, and note-taking sheets. Built for high school and college-level criminal justice, forensic science, or social studies courses.

Buy now for $10!

The Homeschool Quest's Resource Guide



Lost on Katahdin Escape Room



Turn Lost on a Mountain in Maine into a hands-on survival adventure. Kids solve 7 challenges covering navigation, first aid, weather safety, and plant identification while rescuing Donn Fendler from Mount Katahdin. Print and play, 45 to 60 minutes, perfect for ages 8 to 14.

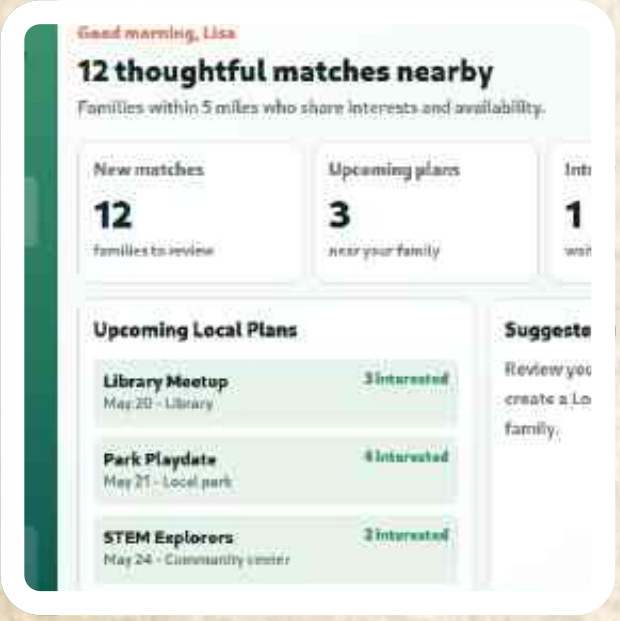
Buy now for $6!

193 Little Adventures Club

Each month, the 193 Little Adventures Club sends a new themed pack straight to your inbox, taking your kids on a Montessori-inspired journey through a different country's culture, festivals, and traditions. Everything comes ready to print, so you can skip the planning and dive into learning together.

Sign up for $9.99/month!

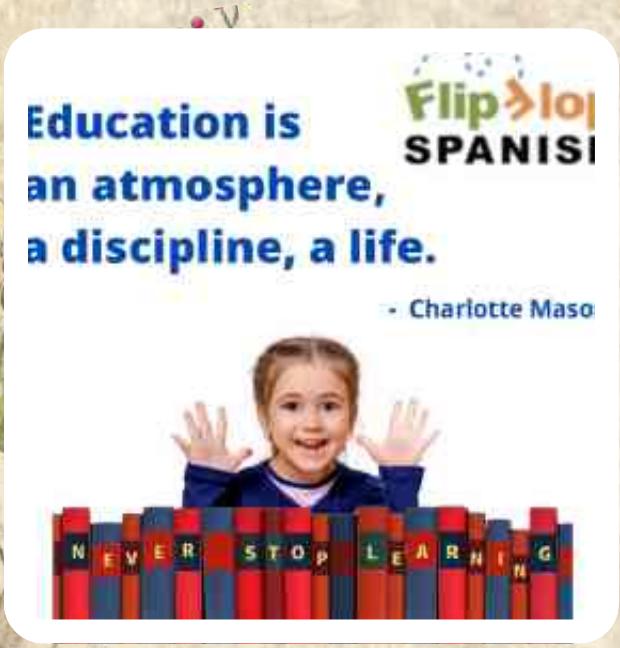
VillageGather Community



VillageGather helps families find like-minded connections, local plans, and school-friendly community options nearby. Try the free tier to explore limited features, or upgrade to full access for $6 a month. Create a profile and start finding families near you today.

Sign up for $6/month!

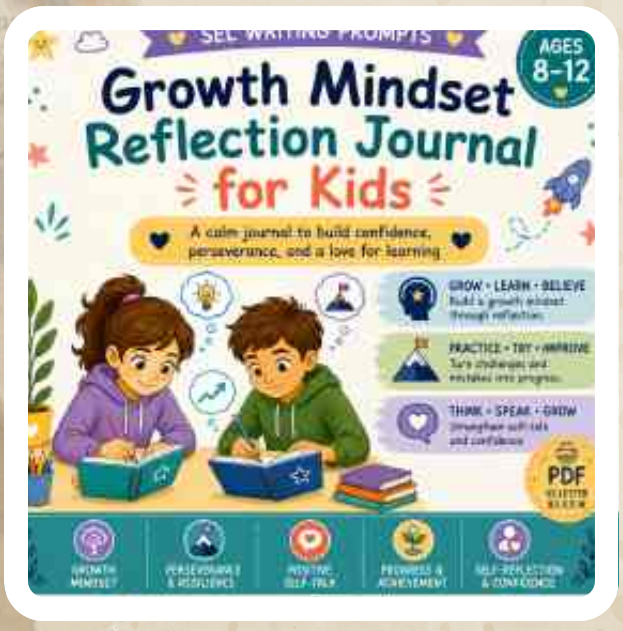
Free Manners Lesson (ebook + audio)



This short ebook and audio lesson teaches 9 common Spanish manners words through a five-day plan built for Charlotte Mason homeschools. Kids listen, act out the words, then color, draw, and play bingo to practice what they've learned, a quick and engaging addition to your week.

FREE Download!

Growth Mindset Journal Ages 8–12



This screen-free, no-prep printable journal for ages 8 to 12 helps kids reframe 'I can't' into 'I'm still learning.' It includes 57 pages of SEL writing prompts built around growth mindset, perseverance, and progress, a simple addition to any homeschool routine.

Buy now for $5!

Kidaro Learning Profile Assessment

Kidaro builds a detailed learning profile for your child across 12 cognitive dimensions, covering strengths like memory, attention, problem solving, and processing speed. One 40-minute interactive session gives you practical insights and activity suggestions you can use for learning at home right away.

Sign Up For Free!

Turn Screen Time Into Real Learning

Game & Learn turns screen time into a real learning adventure. Kids explore private Minecraft worlds, build, collaborate, and make friends in a welcoming online community. The trial is normally $25. Use code Minecraft101 to get it for $10.

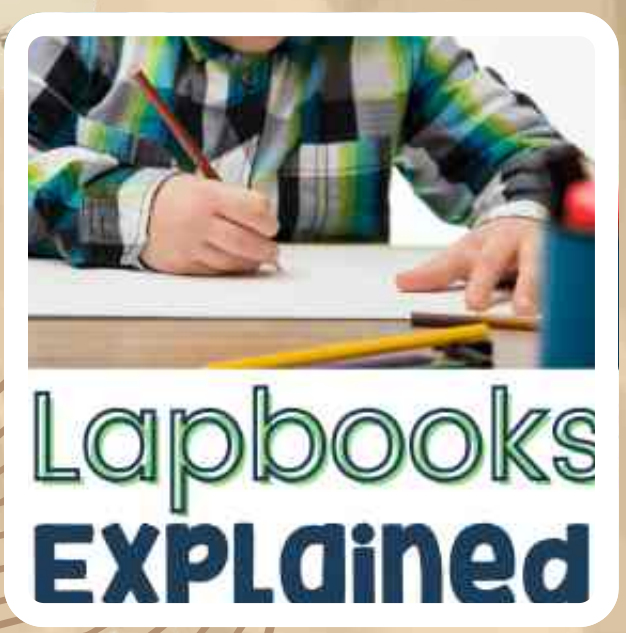
Try It for $10!

Plants & Fungi Family Unit Study

Discover nature with our Plants & Fungi Family Unit Study! Packed with 100+ fun worksheets, it's perfect for homeschoolers exploring the wonders of plants and fungi. Learn together!

Buy it now for $5

What Is a Lapbook, Anyway?



If you've heard homeschoolers mention lapbooks and wondered what they actually are, this blog post breaks it down. A lapbook is just a file folder filled with mini books your child creates, cuts, and fills in about whatever topic you're studying that week.

Read the Blog Post!

5 Back to School Traditions

This free printable includes vision boards in several fun themes, broken into 4 simple sections your child can complete one at a time, plus a 'word of the year' idea to help set a positive tone. A simple way to kick off a new homeschool year with intention.

FREE Download!

MEGA Bug Investigators Family Learning Quest

Ditch the textbooks and dive into MEGA Bug Investigators, 210+ pages of backyard adventures. Hunt insects, solve challenges, and laugh together with guides for all ages, explorer journals, and a 150-page unit study packed with science, art, and games. No prep, just pure family fun. Turn curiosity into a quest today!

Buy it now for $15

National Parks Family Unit Study

Explore America's treasures with our National Parks Family Unit Study! Over 100 pages of fun printables, games, and worksheets spark learning through language arts, facts, and handwriting activities!

Buy it now for $5

MEGA Garden Growers Family Learning Quest

Forget screens, grab a shovel! MEGA Garden Growers turns your backyard into a living lab with 190 pages of seed-to-table adventures. Little sprouts plant their first seeds while big kids design gardens and track growth. Harvest fun and knowledge together!

Buy it now for $15

Ocean & Sea Animals Family Unit Study

Dive into fun with our Ocean & Sea Animals Family Unit Study! Over 120 pages of crafts, reading, math, and games teach kids about marine life while sparking a love for nature!

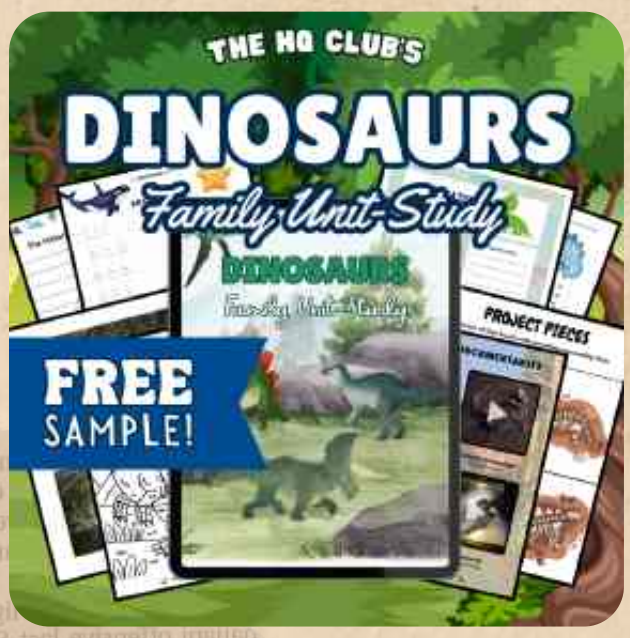
Buy it now for $5

Space Family Learning Quest

Blast off with our Space Family Unit Study! Over 120 pages of fun worksheets, plus our new Family Funday guide! Explore planets and stars with engaging activities for homeschoolers!

Buy it now for $10

Dinosaur Family Unit Study



Roar into learning with our Dinosaurs Family Unit Study! Over 100 fun worksheets for homeschoolers. Explore prehistoric giants through engaging activities. Perfect for curious kids!

Buy it now for $5

Save Weekly for Fees

Put aside a little money each week in a separate savings account, so when it's time to pay fees, evaluators, or curriculum costs, you already have it ready. If you end up under budget, use what's left for field trips or something special. It takes the stress out of big expenses.

Kristin Kondratowski
HOMESCHOOL MOM

AMERICAN FLAG

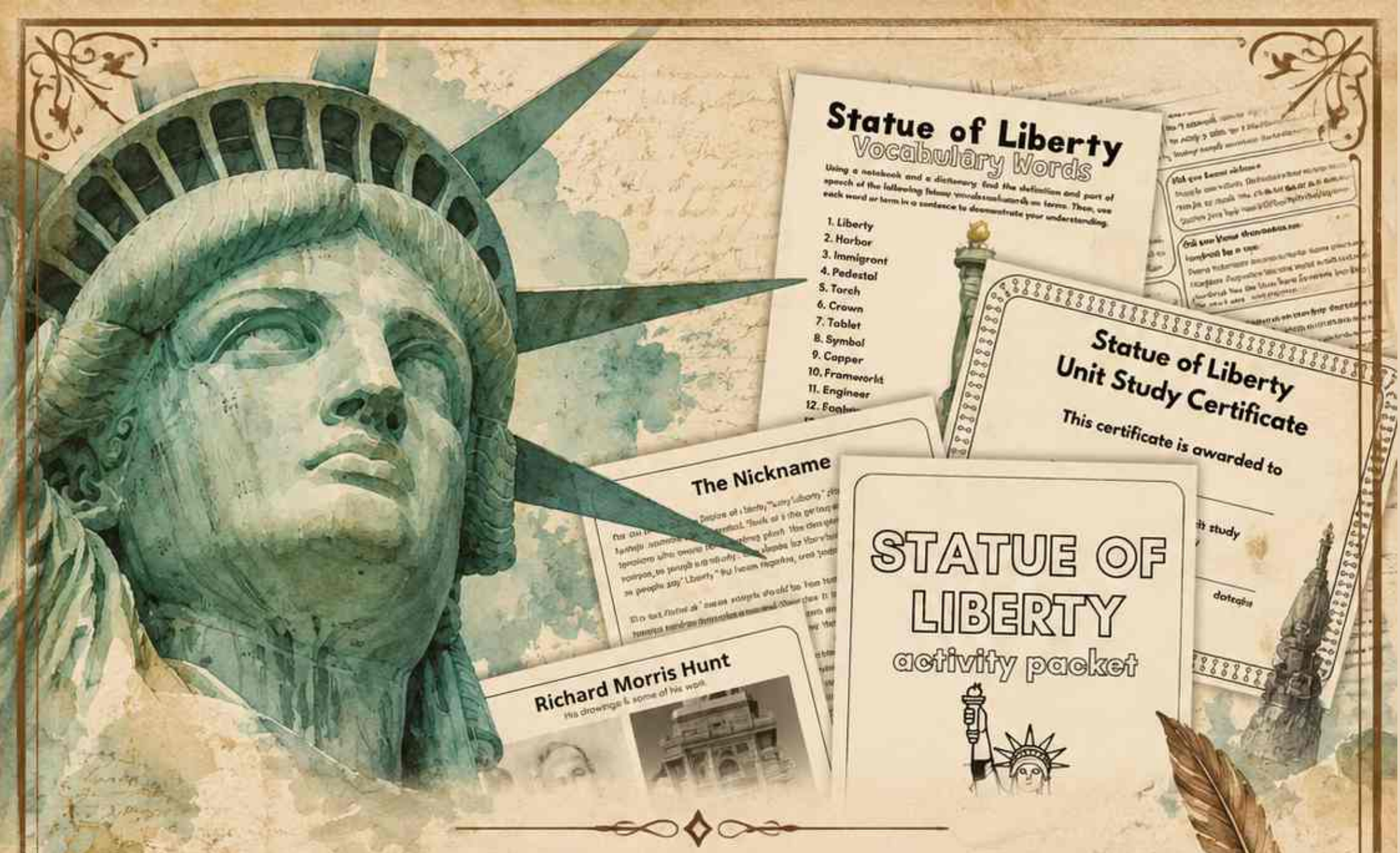
Notebooking Pages

Write, Color, & Draw What You've Learned

3 LEVELED NOTEBOOKING PAGES THAT TURN FLAG HISTORY INTO A KEEPSAKE PROJECT.

These American Flag notebooking pages come in three levels, so every student in the family can join in. Kids record what they learn about the flag as a symbol of freedom while writing, drawing, and coloring. Each level comes in color, photo, and black and white to save on ink.

FREE DOWNLOAD!

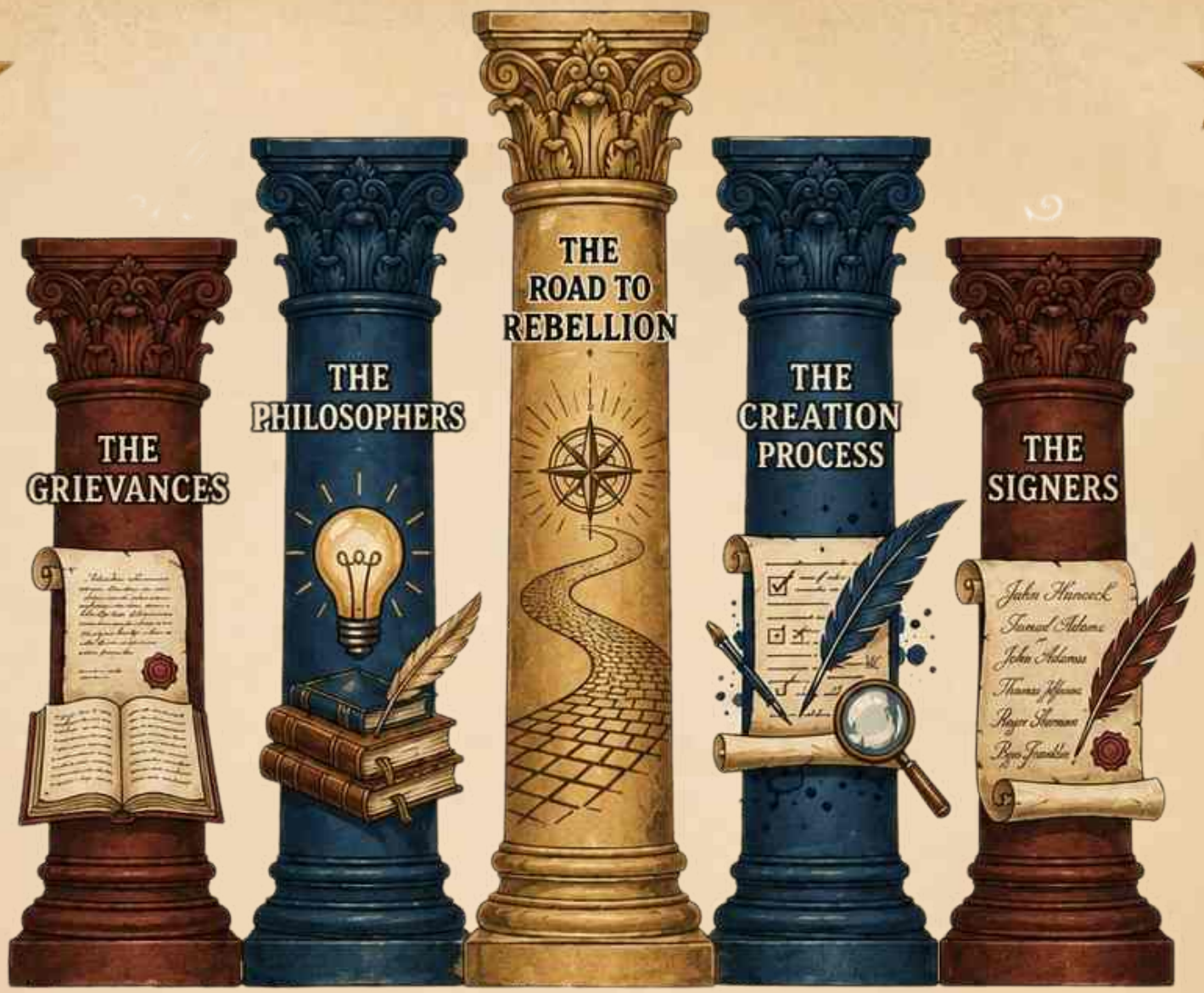


STATUE OF LIBERTY UNIT STUDY

AN 85-PAGE FREE PACKET THAT TURNS LADY LIBERTY INTO A FULL HISTORY ADVENTURE.

This free 85-page packet brings the Statue of Liberty to life through reading passages, vocabulary work, and writing prompts. Kids design their own liberty torch, explore the chemistry behind copper turning green, and think like engineers while learning the history behind one of America's most famous landmarks.

FREE DOWNLOAD!



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

5 PILLARS FRAMEWORK TEACHING GUIDE

This free 33-page teaching guide explores the Declaration of Independence through five angles: the grievances, the philosophers, the road to rebellion, the creation process, and the signers. It works for every age, from simple elementary introductions to deeper high school analysis.

FREE 33-PAGE GUIDE!

Learn Their Style First

Before spending a bunch of money on materials, take time to work with your child and see how they actually learn best. I ended up buying things that never got touched and later donated them to teachers who could use them. A little observation upfront saves you from a pile of expensive guesses.

Cameron Duffy
HOMESCHOOL MOM

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Best LANGUAGE ARTS

Top Picks from the HQ Community:

Reading & Phonics

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Grammar & Writing

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Top Picks from the HQ Community:

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Best CURRICULUM

Top Picks from the HQ Community:

Typing Program

- Typing.com
- TypingClub

Foreign Language Curriculum

- Pimsleur
- Flip Flop Spanish
- Easy Peasy Spanish

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CURRICULUM AWARDS

Best CURRICULUM

Top Picks from the HQ Community:

All-in-One Curriculum

- The Good and the Beautiful
- Campfire Curriculums
- Easy Peasy All-in-One

Teaching Multiple Grades Together

- Gather Round
- Campfire Curriculums

Many thanks to our contributors

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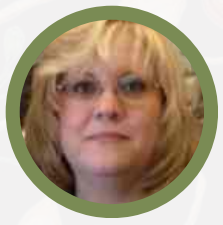

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TIDE WIND ACADEMY HOMESCHOOL

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Meet The Mods

They moderate all the posts!

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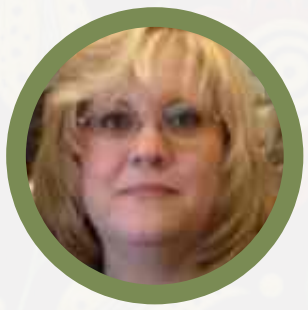

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THE COFFEE FILLED MOM

CARMEN
THE MAGIC ART OF HOMESCHOOL

JINNIE
FARMING MOM

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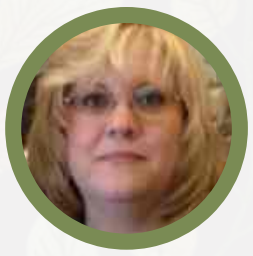

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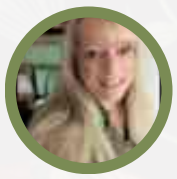
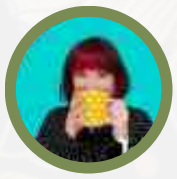


MICHELLE
THE HOMESCHOOL SCIENTIST

JINNIE
FARMING MOM



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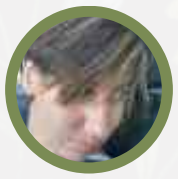

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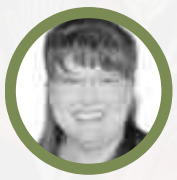

JENNIFER
HOMESCHOOL HELPER ONLINE

KARA
KARACARRERO.COM

Meet The HQ Founders

JANET

AMELIA

LANDY

Our family has spent the last twenty years running a marketing agency and homeschooling from pre-K to high school and beyond. Now we have all teamed up as a family to help homeschooling families around the world find free and affordable resources, curriculum, and more. We are passionate about encouraging homeschool parents that homeschooling on a budget IS possible.

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