

Teaching Methods



A parent is responsible to educate their children. This is not the responsibility of the church or the government. Parents may delegate this responsibility to a private or public school, but maintain accountability to God for their child's preparation for life in all areas, including academic education. Parents are also responsible to equip their children for their own future roles as spouses, parents, citizens, employees, managers, and leaders in the Kingdom of God. Moms and dads give their children the life skills necessary to live productive daily lives and train them to be good stewards of their time, money and health.

An advanced degree is not required to home educate your children. A thirst for knowledge and a love of learning is highly recommended! A positive attitude and enthusiasm for discovery creates an atmosphere conducive for learning.

The goal of teaching is a changed life, not just passing on information. Teachers don't just want information retained for a lifetime, but they want the knowledge to be applied to life in practical and creative ways, and to be a springboard for discovery and invention.

There are several methods to imparting knowledge and wisdom to our children.

Reading Aloud

The earliest and most basic form of teaching still works in high school. Reading aloud is a comfortable memory from babyhood for most of

our children and hopefully something that we continue to use to form lifelong memories for their entire lives. I love to curl up with a good book and enjoying hearing my children read aloud even more than I enjoy doing it myself. I read aloud textbooks, literature, magazines, cereal boxes—you get the picture!!!!

Lectures

Sunday morning sermons prepare our children to learn from lectures because the listening and concentration skills must be developed and sharpened for lectures to be effective. Note-taking is essential to get the most out of a lecture. This combines auditory, kinesthetic and visual learning in one!

Lectures can be given by you or another teacher. They can be formal (standing in front of a room with rows of stiff-backed chairs) or informal (sitting in a rocking chair nursing the baby in the family room). I often combine lecturing with reading aloud and group discussions.

Textbooks

Although textbooks get a bad reputation in homeschooling circles, I actually sit down and read them for fun! There, I've admitted it!

My favorite textbooks are: Our American Heritage (Abeka—third grade history); The Story of Liberty by Charles Coffin; Streams of Civilization (Liberty Press High School); Apologia—ALL!; and The Mystery of History I & II.

Textbooks are more interesting when read aloud interspersed with group discussion, informal lecturing, and funny stories.

Note-taking

Note-taking is an essential skill for lecture listening and textbook reading to be effective. Note-taking requires listening skills, and the ability to analyze data and prioritize information. Outlining is the first step to good note-taking. Often pastors will have 3 or 4 main points to a sermon. If children can learn to take notes using the main points as various headings on an outline, it will foster a skill that is invaluable.

Young children can begin taking notes by drawing pictures, but teens can add doodles and illustrations to their notes too! At first, require note taking and request to actually see the notes (be sure to read them to make sure they know what they are doing!). Soon it will be a habit.

Workbooks

Read. Fill in the blanks. Read. Do a matching set and then a crossword puzzle. Yes, these can be boring, but they are not a bad way to learn math, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, logic or geography. There are good workbooks out there!

Great Books

“Of making of many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.” (Ecclesiastes 12:12) Throughout history, well-written books have come forth that have stood the test of time. Wealth of the Nations by Adam Smith; Federalist Papers & Anti-Federalist Papers by our Founding Fathers; and Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan have not only stood the test of time, but impacted history! IT is always better to read the book itself than to read ABOUT the book. Invest in great classic works like Confessions by St. Augustine and Lex Rex by Samuel Rutherford.

Good Literature

A good story speaks to the heart as well as the mind. Good literature is timeless. Louisa May Alcott and Jane Austin still touch deep places in my daughters’ hearts with their stories. Jules Verne and Mark Twain still call boys on grand adventures! Make a place for literature in as many classes as possible. Much is gleaned as the pages are turned with pure delight!!!

Historical Literature

Like good literature, historical fiction brings a time and place alive for the reader in a fresh way. It is the next best thing to time travel! Choose books that don’t take a lot of liberty with historical facts and cultural mores. It is hard not to place our culture and its philosophy into another setting but there are many writers who pull off historical fiction in grand style. They are worth reading! Some of my very favorites: A Proud Taste for Scarlet & Miniver by EL Konigsburg; Adam of the Road by Elizabeth Janet Gray; The Runaway by Patricia St. John; The Hawk that Dare not Hunt by Day by Scott O’Dell; and The Scarlett Pimpernel by Baroness Orczy. My home library is PACKED with great historical fiction!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Historical Movies, Videos, & DVDs

The Sound of Music brings Austria during WWII alive for me. The scenery is gorgeous, the family endearing, and the tragedy of the Auschwitz frightening. *Operation Petticoat*, also set in WWII, doesn't quite do the job that the *Sound of Music* does. The *Ten Commandments*, though with many flaws and inaccuracies, certainly brings many aspects of the Exodus to life in a grand way! Even *It's a Wonderful Life* brings us through the early 1900s in a scenic, though superficial, history lesson. We are a visual culture and excellent movies help to paint a vivid picture for our children of different time periods. Choose carefully and avoid filth!

Audio Teaching on Tapes & CDs

We have immensely enjoyed Dianna Waring's history tapes. Her enthusiasm bubbles over the sound waves and her joy in learning history is contagious! Everything from sermons to class lectures is available now. Be sure to choose a speaker with a pleasant voice who can keep your children's attention.

Stories on CD

Focus on the Family's *Odessey* tapes immediately come to my mind. My teens loved them as children, but I still catch them listening in when my little ones are listening to these well-made audio shows. Many books and tapes are available on tapes or CDs. It's the next best thing to reading aloud, especially if you have popcorn or warm freshly-baked cookies.

Songs on CD

I still have all the words memorized from songs I listening to in high school. I will be shopping in a store and suddenly find myself singing along word for word with a song that I really don't want to be singing!! Music is a powerful tool to help your children memorize facts, dates, and Scripture. We have especially enjoyed *Grammar Songs*, *Skip Counting* (from Math-U-See) and *States & Capitals*. I still hear those songs in my head. Many worship CDs contain songs that are taken straight from Scripture, often the Psalms.

Teaching me Spanish, a combination of songs and dialogue was a great introduction to Spanish for my little ones. All my children learned to read while singing along with *Sing, Spell, Read & Write*.

Classes on DVD or Video

The quality of these just gets better and better! Again make sure the speaker is interesting and can keep viewers attention. Poor recording quality can be distracting. Several homeschool publishers offer classes on video. Although quite old, I enjoy the video series by Francis Schaeffer “*How Then Shall We Live?*”.

Group Discussions

You don’t need a classroom full of people to get the group dynamics needed for this teaching method. (The dinner table makes a lovely place for intellectual discussions!) Three makes a group! All that is needed are some good open-ended questions. Ask “What could he have done differently?” or “What would you have done in his place?” rather than, “Did he do the right thing?”

Asking Questions

“What would you have done if you were President Reagan?” “Why does it seem that France and England are constantly at war throughout history and does geography play a role?” “How does the plant’s structural design give protection?” Questions should start easy with only recall needed to answer. “When was the cell discovered?”

They should progress to comprehension and application questions such as “How are these two animals alike?” “What is the author saying in this paragraph?” “If an electron leaves its outer shell, then what happens?”

The next step questions take is analysis and problem-solving. “Why did the battle strategy fail?” “How can we improve your watercolor painting?” “What evidence supported Newton’s hypothesis?”

Finally, evaluation questions are asked where your student gives his/her opinion. “Do you agree with England’s decision not to rescue Czar Nicholas and his family?” “Would it have been better for the author to wait another chapter before introducing this character?”

Answering Questions

“Is there anything you don’t understand?” often leads to questions for me, the teacher. Know what you are teaching well enough to be confident when you answer student questions. But DON’T make answers up! If you don’t know the answer, look it up together with your student. Be enthusiastic about material you are teaching so that your students are interested and hungry to learn even more about the topic!

Narrating

Narration is simply the act of retelling what you have just read or heard. This can be done very casually without drawing attention to what you are doing? Begin this practice when children are VERY young and you are reading aloud to them. “Now you tell Mommy the story.” They retell you the story from the picture book you are reading and they are “narrating”. When you are reading aloud from a textbook, book or magazine stop reading occasionally and ask questions that force you listeners to retell or narrate what you have just read. Help them to push past quote you back word for word to explaining in their own words what they have heard.

You can also bring forth narration by asking questions about whether or not they enjoyed the book or story and why. Narration in written form leads to writing summaries.

Writing Summaries

This is simply narration in written form that is condensed. A summary is shorter than the actual printed work. If you read a two page paper, a good summary would be a paragraph. The shortness is actually important because it forces students to choose what is more important and what is less important. It also helps them to discern the main points and sub-points which leads to making outlines.

Making Outlines

This goes beyond summarizing to prioritizing and discerning the main points and main sub points. A deeper level of thought is required to process the information than simply recall and summary. Here is a sample outline.

Essentials for Good Health

- I. Diet
 - A. Plenty of water
 - B. Whole grains, fruits and vegetables
 - 1. fresh fruit not canned
 - 2. whole grains not refined
 - C. Vitamins, minerals
- II. Exercise
 - A. Aerobic
 - 1. 5-7 times a week
 - 2. Target heart rate
 - B. Balance

- C. Weight Training
- D. Stretching
 - 1. Warm-up
 - 2. Cool down
- III. Sleep
- IV. Fresh Air & Sunshine

Writing Analysis

Taking summarizing and outlining to the next level where a value judgment is given by the student requiring an even deeper level of thought. An analysis summarizes writing, speaking or a situation and then evaluates it. An opinion is given that is supported by data or examples.

Magazines

We have found *World Magazine* to be a valuable resource for teaching current events from a conservative Christian perspective. When the children were younger we subscribed to *Discovery*, a science magazine. There are many excellent Christian magazines out there. Beautiful full color pictures make these attractive to all ages.

Drawing, Cartooning, & Illustrating

My children made political cartoons of Tetzal selling indulgences. This reinforced the resulting Reformation in their minds. To make a cartoon, you have to think through several things about what you are drawing including the setting (place and time period). There is a lot of processing of information to illustrate a lesson or book. The beauty of it all is that your student has NO IDEA how much thinking about the subject they are doing and is actually having FUN!

Nature Walks

My children piled out of Dianna's suburban covered with mud and grinning from ear to ear after accompanying Dianna and her husband on a nature walk at a park near Lake Jessup. I think they enjoyed getting muddy more than observing all the plants and animals on the wet trail. These are even more effective if your students bring a sketch pad or a digital camera and can look up their finds on the internet when they get home.

Collections

From coins to dolls to butterflies to postcards, collections teach. Every postcard, doll, stamp and coin has a location: geography and a story: history. Every butterfly has variation and distinction: science. Collections often start because something looks “neat!” and within months your collector is an expert in his field. This leads to delight-directed studies.

Experiments

Yes, your children will probably make a huge mess with experiments, but their value is undeniable. What kid doesn't want to blow something up—no, I'm not recommending actual explosive devices but pouring vinegar over baking soda is exciting! (chemistry!!!!) *Backyard Scientist* has experiments that are easy and fun for children of all ages. Apologia's high school science books contain experiments that can be done at home with everyday supplies. You can also order their kit. If you are scared off by experiments, order Alpha Omega's science experiment videos and watch them on your TV.

Telling or Writing Stories

Most of us have a storyteller inside of us longing to get out because we are made in the image of a GREAT STORYTELLER! Writing stories is usually fun for students once they get the story rolling (help your less imaginative students with a story starter!) and is a great outlet for applying knowledge of a time period in history. Writing fiction involves the use of descriptive and narrative writing. When they rewrite, help them to bring the characters alive in their dialogues with vivid words. Use actions and behavior to show the character's personality rather than descriptive words. Help you writer to “paint a picture” for the read in their descriptive writing. (Understanding Writing is the best teacher of descriptive writing that I have ever seen!)

Writing Poems, Songs & Skits

One of the funniest songs I've ever heard in college was on the five points of Calvinism. The songwriter was an older grad student and I've never forgotten the five points. My children write limericks, funny songs and amusing ballads to illustrate things they are learning in history or science. They have also written hilarious skits to illustrate a Biblical principle. As in illustrating, much processing of information is required to create and they don't even know they are learning. It's just fun!

Reciting or Performing Poems, Songs & Skits

The act of speaking reinforces learning. Drama reinforces learning for the performer and the audience. A skit or play, like a movie, brings a time period or bit of knowledge alive within the context of conversation and a story line. Singing songs about a subject or event combine so many senses that memory recall is inevitable. Also, a catchy melody will stick in someone's mind, bringing the lyrics along with it. (Although it can be terrible when you just can get that silly song about hurricanes out of your mind!)

Projects

PLEASE do NOT do your student's science fair project for them. The act of putting together a project for display is an amazing teaching tool. In between cutting and pasting, knowledge and understanding can stick to the ribs of your child's intellectual framework. Provide plenty of construction paper, scissors, glue, and a cardboard backdrop. Allow them to print things off the computer and cut them with your fancy scrapbooking scissors. There will be problem-solving analysis that causes them to place things in a certain order on the frame. They will also have to investigate and prioritize in choosing what to actually place in their project. A little friendly competition with prizes doesn't hurt either!

Writing Essays

Writing is an awesome learning tool. Writing requires remembering and synthesizing material. There is a need to think logically in order to communicate through the written word. Expressing oneself on paper is similar to speaking, but requires more thinking skills in order to use words that are concrete, yet concise. Material must be sorted through in order to decide what knowledge will actually be expressed in the paper. Often, opinions are expressed in these papers. In the process of writing an essay, there is sometimes a need for further research, requiring the student to dig deeper into the material.

Writing a Report

Writing a good report should be more than going to the internet and jotting down some facts from various web sites, changing the wording and

typing it up. A good report involves RESEARCH! Students should be required to read at least three books, as well as other written works (e.g. magazines) in their preparation for the actual writing. A report focuses in on a certain subject which is then researched and “reported on” in written form. What a wonderful learning tool! Every older child should write reports regularly!

Writing a Research Paper

By this I mean a full-blown research paper complete with note cards, footnotes and a bibliography. Any good English handbook will give you step by step instructions on writing a formal research paper. With a research paper, you make a hypothesis, called a thesis statement, and then go on to research, proving or disproving your original theory. The result is a research paper. The bulk of time and effort in this form of writing goes into the research itself. Research is recorded on notecards with their sources identified. Not only does one spend hours and hours intensely researching a subject, but a student is exposed to all kinds of media that offer knowledge.

Presenting a Report

Simply have your student read his/her report or research paper aloud for a small group of people. The act of reading aloud or talking about a subject always cements the knowledge into a student’s memory and causes him/her to think more deeply about the subject. Be sure to have your presenter take questions.

Give a Speech

You may have to look for opportunities for your teen to engage in public speaking to larger groups of people. But giving a speech to the family after dinner is a good start. Let the first audiences be positive and affirming to your student. Preparing a speech is a lot like writing an essay or report, except that it has to sound good to your listeners. In the practice of giving a speech, changes are often made and things begin to make more sense about the subject of the speech.

Teaching Younger Children

When you teach something, it cements it more strongly in your brain. A teen can teach his younger brothers and sisters or another family’s

younger children something that he has learned in one of his classes. This will require your teen to simplify the material and make it easier to understand. The process of doing this causes one to learn the material more thoroughly. The old saying is true: “no one learns more than the teacher who prepared the lesson!”

Working in a Group

Working together to learn something, complete a task, perform something or complete a project helps children and teenagers to grow relationally. Often problem-solving skills are required and always, tact and good manners are necessary to keep the group running smoothly. Group learning involves listening to one another, often to very different perspectives or points of view. Discussions are wonderful ways to learn material! In the performance of a task or completion of a project, there are often changes made and deviations from the original plan. Those who put forth the most effort, walk away having grown the most in knowledge and understanding of the subject at hand.