

# Living Education

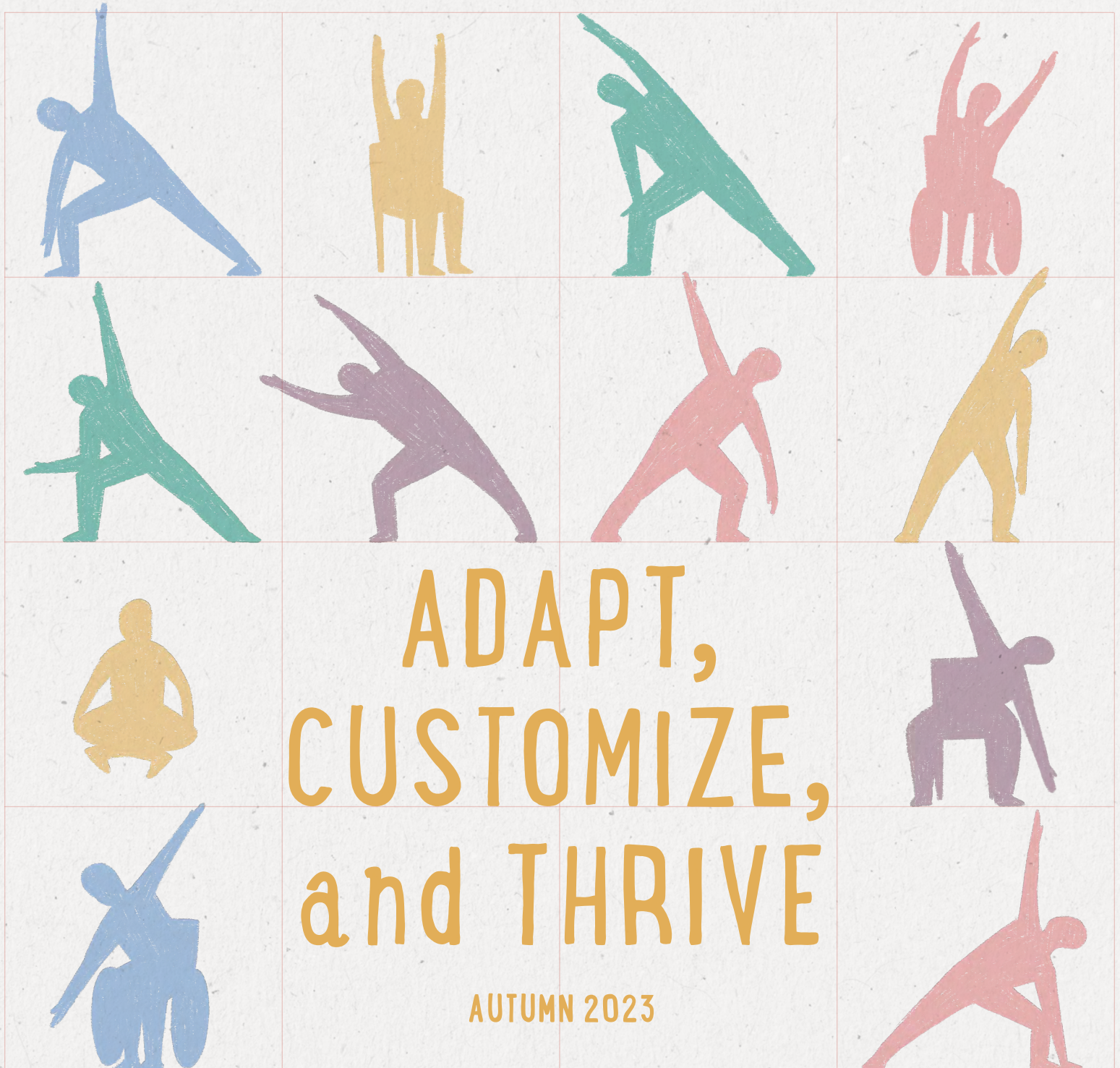
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**Oak  
Meadow**

K-12 CURRICULUM AND  
DISTANCE LEARNING



ADAPT,  
CUSTOMIZE,  
and THRIVE

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BUILDING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE HOMESCHOOL \* AUTUMN CRAFT: GIFTS IN JARS



# Welcome.

Every homeschooling experience is wonderfully unique. One of the best parts of homeschooling is being able to learn in a way that works best for your family. Because every student is different, you might find yourself approaching the same subject in varying ways, depending on your children's interests, strengths, and challenges. Perhaps you incorporate art into math work to help your little artist be more engaged. Maybe you weave creative writing into science lessons for your budding writer. Adapting lessons to your children's interests and learning preferences is a perk and a hallmark of homeschooling.

Many families take advantage of their love of travel to bring alive lessons in history, geography, and civics. Visiting a historical site that relates to a social studies lesson, taking a field trip to explore a natural landform as part of science studies, using a map to navigate a park and develop mapping skills, and writing about a museum exhibit are all ways families have added vibrancy to their home learning.

This issue is all about how homeschoolers adapt and customize their learning experiences so their students can live their learning, love their learning, and thrive!

Happy reading,

*Dee Dee*

DeeDee Hughes, Editor





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# ADAPTING for HOMESCHOOL SUCCESS

BY LINDSAY BANTON

**F**rustration, overwhelm, and resistance described our homeschool days rather than *confidence, calm, and ownership* because something wasn't right. We all felt clunky and out of sorts, like when you put your favorite shirt on backwards and wonder why something just feels off. All the same parts were there, just in the wrong order or not used correctly. We've needed to adapt quite a bit in our homeschool, and often I was the last person to realize it.

## SWAPPING FOR SUCCESS

The easiest adaptation we've made was with a simple swap of a textbook. I purchased a beautifully published, well-trusted high school-level science book. It was packed full of everything we would need. Other families with similar standards for homeschooling were using it, so I never thought to consider whether it was right for us. We began the year with lofty goals but soon realized the textbook was presenting topics in greater detail than we needed. One of my children felt overwhelmingly frustrated.

For a few weeks, I attempted to simplify the scope of the content and create my own assessments that required a more realistic amount of challenge and learning. That worked for a while, but I was beginning to find it hard to determine which parts of the chapters were truly necessary for our learning and which weren't. So, despite my frugal I-bought-this-and-we-will-use-it attitude, I switched out the book entirely. I handed my student something manageable and much less intimidating (and something we already had on our shelf, surprisingly). She is finishing the year feeling successful and capable of onboarding adequate levels of information.



## SEPARATE SPACE FOR SUCCESS

A physically bigger shift I've made in our homeschool required the relocation of one child to another room in the house. His energy level, along with needing space to move and verbal instruction, made it hard for the others to complete their work. Again, I was the last to realize it, but I was forced to think differently, and we've all benefited.

We don't have a dedicated school space; the dining room table has been everyone's school table for years. Our set-up is great because we are centrally located in the house. From my chair I can see the driveway for deliveries, quickly step into the kitchen to start dinner, stretch over my right shoulder and reach the printer, and even hear the washer and dryer finish their loads. However, my energetic elementary schooler was easily distracted by Dad walking through the room and his sisters' questions. He had not yet mastered the skill of remaining focused if I walked away for a few minutes, so starting dinner or changing laundry loads sidetracked him. Additionally, his volume and wiggles distracted everyone.

After weeks of everyone feeling frustrated, I finally relented from my chair of central command and made him an "office" in his bedroom by repositioning a bookshelf and reclaiming the space under his dormer window for learning only. I cleaned off his unused desk, removed all the distracting wall posters, and set very clear expectations about what could and could not be taken into his office. Now, he has a dedicated space we visit together every morning. He gets my full attention in our separate space, and everyone else can get their work done a little easier.

## SHIFTING STATE OF MIND FOR SUCCESS

Although swapping textbooks and creating new learning spaces in our home felt like monumental adaptations in the moment, the true change came to my own mindset. Over the course of our 13-year homeschooling journey, I have needed to adjust my expectations, my hopes, my goals, even my whole definition of homeschooling. Because, in the end, I am a hostess, a curator, and a buffet-preparer. I need to serve my kids the nutrient-dense meal of education. They are individuals with unique interests, skill sets, and futures. It would be silly to force them into the shape I think they should fit into or into the shape of a sibling. A large portion of education,

from my perspective, is learning about who these fantastic people are and helping them become that person. I need to provide the tools, spaces, and resources that will best benefit my kids, not me. I need to eliminate things that make learning so tough and replace them with whatever makes learning tasty, whatever makes them come back for more.

Although I receive a gift while homeschooling—the honor of having a front-row seat to their discoveries—ultimately, I homeschool for my children's benefit. It feels ridiculous to even remind myself of that. It isn't convenient. It isn't one size fits all. It doesn't squeeze into the tidy boxes I wish it would. But it's good, and it's shaping all of us. Adapting my homeschool mindset for the benefit of my kids forces me to problem-solve in ways I never expected. Ultimately, isn't that why I homeschool in the first place?

## CHECK YOUR SHIRT

What about you? Does your shirt just not feel right today? Check the tags, maybe it's on backwards. Are your kids resistant to tasting the educational buffet you've spread before them? Check the books, maybe they are causing more frustration than satisfaction. Is everyone upset or distracted by something daily? Check the set-up, maybe something needs to shift with your location or space. Are you hesitant to give up your central command chair because it's so convenient for you? Check your mindset, maybe something needs to be reframed so the education goals are for the benefit of the students rather than the teacher.

Homeschooling affords the opportunity to remain nimble enough to adapt at a moment's notice, to observe the needs of each of our students, and to move at a pace that allows us to realize that adaptations are indispensable.

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*Lindsay Banton is a homeschool mom to three kids, married to a fabulous man who keeps her caffeinated, and just released her first book *Trail Guide: A Simple Manual for Understanding the Bible*, which you can read about at [www.lindsaybanton.com](http://www.lindsaybanton.com) or [@LindsayBanton](https://www.instagram.com/LindsayBanton) on Instagram.*



# WHY HOMESCHOOLING WORKS FOR OUR MEDICALLY COMPLEX FAMILY

BY SHAINA SMITH

If you asked our family of three how or why we started homeschooling, we'd most likely all agree the decision was partly circumstantial and, while not planned, homeschooling has been a surprisingly pleasant change for our family.

Like the majority of American families at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, we were thrown into the deep end of the distance-learning swimming pool. The virtual classroom setting relieved anxiety for my husband and me because we didn't know if the virus would negatively impact children with chronic conditions, like Landon. Diagnosed with a genetic connective tissue disorder called hypermobility Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), Landon has had a 504 plan in place since the first grade.

## CHALLENGES OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 offers children the right to access educational services that meet their needs. This plan, which promotes a student's ability to thrive during their educational career, is crafted between the family and the school district. Unfortunately, these helpful mechanisms available when students are learning on site and in person weren't easily modifiable in a virtual classroom setting.

Distance learning's fast-paced culture made it difficult for our not-so-little "zebra" (an endearing term to honor a person living with a rare disease, especially those with

EDS) to effectively exercise his 504 plan—he could not step away from his laptop and take breaks without missing important information. Landon became incredibly fatigued; his cognitive function was slipping to a place that was out of character, and he was exhibiting emotional distress. Fortunately, Landon's therapist aided in identifying the distance-learning triggers that exacerbated symptoms. We then advocated for alternative and new accommodations that better transferred into a virtual learning environment. Landon made it through the fourth and fifth grades, meeting or exceeding expectations.

Our next challenge came as districts were returning to classrooms. Already riddled with fatigue, low blood pressure, dizziness, muscle weakness, and pain from his medical condition, we didn't want to risk Landon having more health issues to grapple with at such a young age. We reached out to his pediatrician for support and guidance. Landon's doctor felt it appropriate to submit a letter from his office to the district, requesting it allow Landon to continue his education at home for the 2021–2022 school year. The district provided us with tutoring





services through a third party, but this method didn't work out. We withdrew Landon from the school district and have been homeschooling ever since.

Curious as to Landon's take on our educational adventure, I asked him a few questions:

***Do you think homeschooling could be a beneficial option for kids with EDS or other chronic conditions? Why or why not?***

*Yes, I do believe homeschooling is a benefit for kids with EDS or other chronic conditions. It offers a much more flexible schedule for kids when they may be having a bad chronic pain day due to their condition.*

***When you were in school, you had a 504 plan that let you leave the classroom when you needed to take breaks, rest in the office, have water at your desk, and other helpful tools. Now that you are homeschooling, have you noticed if you are able to have the same number of helpful tools and support as you did from your 504 plan, if you have less support, or if you have more support?***

*I feel like I have more support than before. I am still able to get the things that I need such as water, rest, and breaks,*

*especially on fatigue days. The 504 plan at school was helpful, but compared to being at home, it didn't provide as much help as I believe was needed. One time, I was having bad neck pain when I was at school, and I went to the nurse's office. I was able to rest there with an ice pack, but being in such a loud school building, I wasn't able to fully get rid of my neck/headache because of background noises and having no place for solitude. One of the days I was at home, I started getting overwhelmingly tired. I was able to bring my school supplies up to my bed and do work slowly as needed, in the quiet of my room, resting whenever I felt like it.*

***Think about your lifestyle and interests. Has homeschooling added anything to your lifestyle, interests, hobbies, etc.?***

*Yes, it has. During the course of homeschooling, I've been able to discover my love for the piano. I also have the ability to travel to places during the school week, such as New Hampshire, and pack my schoolwork to do while away from home. Once I get my school done, I can go to places, such as the farm near where we live.*





Eliminating the school clock has allowed us both to pay better attention to our bodies' needs in the morning and throughout the day.



Weaving together his passions and academic work not only makes his educational experience more enjoyable, but it has inspired Landon to generate his own experiments and projects.



## ADVANTAGES OF HOMESCHOOLING

We've all noticed the advantages homeschooling offers to medically complex families like ours. Flexibility is one. On days that the fatigue monster pays a visit to Landon, he can hold off on his work until later in the day when he's feeling better. We can extend deadlines or even complete makeup work on the weekends. If he doesn't have the energy to type or handwrite, we verbally discuss lessons; I'll also offer additional support by reading the unit lessons to him aloud. I'll also swap a reading section for an educational video on the same topic if he's having a bad physical week. Homeschool affords Landon the ability to use ice packs, heating pads, pillows, and his cane, any time, any place; he can also rest whenever needed and can (and does!) lay down in bed while doing some of his assignments.

Scheduling appointments is much easier now that we can say yes to available openings. This has reduced delays in receiving the care Landon needs without disrupting the school day. Goodbye doctor's notes, and hello to working around self-care needs!

Another plus? No more attendance issues! Landon's condition resulted in him frequently coming home from school before meeting the number of hours required to constitute a full school day. Now, schooling starts and ends based on his health needs. Because we don't follow the public-school calendar, we decide which holiday observances to take off and if/when we want to schedule vacation breaks. Homeschooling is also zebra-mom friendly. Due to my chronic conditions, getting Landon to and from school on time was a challenge. Eliminating the school clock has allowed us both to pay better attention to our bodies' needs in the morning and throughout the day.

Here are a few more reasons why we like homeschooling:

- **Life lessons happen outside of the classroom.** Despite our physical limitations, we love exploring! We do a lot of sightseeing (in and out of the car), day trips, and nature walks. We've made it a point to incorporate travel into our lifestyle because it's an activity we can modify to fit our health needs. Most of our adventures take place when other kids are still in school, which is an added bonus if we're going on a field trip to a popular location.

- **There's time to expand hobbies.** The flexible schedule gives Landon the chance to discover new interests. Since homeschooling, he's taken an interest in playing the piano. He's also enjoying spending more time drawing, developing his illustration and animation talents, and taking photos.
- **It's student-led and nature-based.** While we purchased a comprehensive curriculum that encourages students to learn through experience, observation, and exploring the natural world, I encourage Landon to bring his own learning topics and ideas to the table. Weaving together his passions and academic work not only makes his educational experience more enjoyable, but it has inspired Landon to generate his own experiments and projects. This has, in turn, allowed him to continue practicing his research, writing, reading, and independent-learning skills.

If you are considering homeschooling for health reasons, whether for your own or your child's well-being, know that there are no right or wrong choices. You know your family better than anyone, and you can feel if something isn't right or isn't working for your child. That same intuition can be helpful when considering homeschooling, implementing a 504 plan, utilizing tutoring services, and other resources available. You can adapt your unique situation to provide optimal experiences for your learner.

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*Shaina Smith lives in Rhode Island with her husband, son, and their menagerie of animals. She served many years advocating for children and adults living with chronic pain. Diagnosed with both chronic mental and physical disorders, Shaina uses her personal experiences within her freelance writing pieces to empower others. She enjoys illustration, traveling, and rescuing animals.*



[ FROM THE ARCHIVES ]

# LAWN MOWING AND EPIPHANIES

BY LAWRENCE WILLIAMS



Homeschooling parents are a remarkably diverse group, but over the years I've noticed they seem to have one particular quality in common: they want to make life more enjoyable for their children. This is a wonderful concept, but it can create a lot of damage if we go about it in the wrong way. Many parents wrongly assume that they can make life more enjoyable for their children by making life easier for them, so they give them a lot and ask very little of them in return. This might be a good recipe for a birthday party, but as a foundation for life, it's disastrous.

Children need love, appreciation, and respect. These are critical to the development of a healthy self-concept. But to develop inner strength, children need challenges. This is the only way inner strength can be developed. Nothing else will do it. Not love. Not appreciation. Not respect. As a concept, this may sound wonderful, but when we're in the middle of it, it's not wonderful. It's painful. It means we have to watch our children struggle and not lift a hand to help them, and this goes against all our instincts. When they're infants and young toddlers, all our waking moments are spent meeting their every need, protecting them from harm, helping them be as happy as they can be. Then, just as we've begun to master the art of making them happy, we find that "making them happy" is beginning to weaken them. They rely upon us for their strength. They rely upon external conditions for their happiness. And as long as that is true, they will never be free—and neither will we.

So, we have to lead them into the next stage of the journey. We have to help them discover that strength and happiness come from within. Does this mean we should make life as difficult as possible for them? No, that just creates a whole different set of problems. Instead, we must develop an appreciation for the value of challenges in their lives, present them with challenges that are appropriate for their age and development, and then stand back and let them struggle with these challenges themselves. It's painful to watch them struggle, and it's hard to resist the urge to jump in and rescue them, but if we persist, we help them discover a source of strength more enduring and accessible than any we can offer.

When I was about eleven years old, our family moved out of our apartment in the city and into a house a few miles outside of town. This house came with lots of green grass growing all around it, and as soon as we moved in, my parents told me my job was cutting the grass. I hated that job, but there was no way I could get around it. I had to do it. Once a week, every week from late spring to early fall, I cut our lawn: a front yard and a back yard connected by one narrow strip of grass on each side. As I look back on it now, it wasn't a terribly difficult thing to do, and it only took about two hours, but I dreaded doing it. I came up with every lame excuse imaginable to get out of it. "I don't feel good... I have a lot of homework to do... I'm allergic to grass... I promised the guys I'd play baseball..."



Fortunately, my parents didn't buy my excuses, at least not very often. Sometimes my father would get tired of my moaning and groaning, and he would cut it himself. My mother even pitched in a few times. But afterwards, they would always let me know that they weren't happy about that. As my father reminded me many times, he and my mother worked hard all day—five (and often six) days a week—to support our family, and the last thing either of them wanted to do was come home after a long day at work and cut the grass. After hearing that from him a few times, I decided that cutting the grass was easier. So, I cut the grass.

One day, when I was in the middle of cutting the front lawn, I had an epiphany. When I started, the grass was especially overgrown, probably due to some extra rainfall...or more likely because I had fabricated some especially brilliant excuse that caught my parents off guard and bought me a few extra days. In any case, I suddenly noticed the patterns I was making in the grass with the lawn mower. Those patterns were always there, of course, but I had never really noticed them before because I was too busy moaning and groaning. Suddenly, however, the stark contrast between the overgrown scraggly grass and the smooth clean patterns left by the lawn mower seemed luminous and full of significance. I saw the overgrown grass as my old self: weak, undisciplined, full of self-pity and lame excuses. The clean, geometrical patterns of the cut side were the new me: strong, clear, disciplined, and organized. And I knew that by cutting the grass every week, I was gradually transforming the old me into the new me. The immensity of this hit me, and I reached over and shut off the lawn mower.

I stood transfixed under the deep blue summer sky, with the sun pouring down upon me and the sweat dripping off my forehead, absorbing the full implications of what I had just seen. Realizations tumbled upon me in rapid succession. If I really could transform myself, if I could rise above my weaknesses, if I could find meaning in something as dreadful as cutting grass, then I was the master of my fate! I didn't have to worry ever again about what life might bring my way, for I had the strength within myself to handle it. Let the obstacles come! Bring on the wind and the rain, the thunder and lightning! Nothing outside of me would ever have power over me again, for I could choose to see things differently. I could choose happiness over sadness, strength over weakness. I was free!

With great excitement, I reached down and pulled on the mower starter rope. The motor jumped to life, and I started wading into the thick grass again. But as I pushed the mower, I was not the same person who had started cutting the grass only minutes before. I was new, transformed, and connected to an inner strength I had never known before. I strode across the lawn with confidence and joy, reveling in my mastery over a chore that had once mastered me. I became an artist immersed in the joy of creation, cutting the lawn in wide curves and sweeping patterns, proclaiming to the neighborhood, and the world, that this was no ordinary mortal cutting the lawn... this was a free human being!

In the years that followed this event, I still created a few lame excuses now and then (transformation is a gradual process, even if epiphanies are not), but I never returned completely to my previous state of degeneracy, and I never forgot that experience. I cut the grass more regularly, dreaded it less often, and realized more and more deeply that the reins of strength and happiness were in my own hands. Eventually, I graduated from high school and went on to college (encouraged by the fact that I wouldn't have to cut grass around the dormitories). A few years later, my parents sold the house and moved closer to the city, into an apartment with no yard, so I never cut that lawn again. Now, I only cut my own lawn occasionally, when my son comes up with a particularly brilliant excuse that catches me off guard. But I've learned there are things that can't be learned in books, and I know that challenges bring deep rewards. So, every chance I get, I give my children opportunities to struggle against seemingly insurmountable obstacles, so they too can discover the strength and happiness within themselves.

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*Lawrence Williams co-founded Oak Meadow in 1975, along with his wife Bonnie, in order to homeschool their own children. Since then, Oak Meadow's curriculum and distance learning school have helped families around the world create successful homeschooling experiences.*





BY RUTH O'NEIL

I am a planner. Always have been. Always will be. I like things to go as planned, but you know something?

That's often not how my life turns out. It was the same with homeschooling. I had a picture in my mind of what I wanted it to be, but again my plans were thwarted when I had one child with minor learning disabilities and two who hated school. The picture of us working together, always smiling, as if we were part of a Norman Rockwell print, quickly faded into the background as reality set in. I learned a few things over the twenty years of homeschooling my kids, and one of those things was to think outside the box. Even the best curriculum with perfectly explained lesson plans needs to be tossed aside once in a while. If you do that, you might be surprised at how much your children can learn and how fun it can be for all of you.

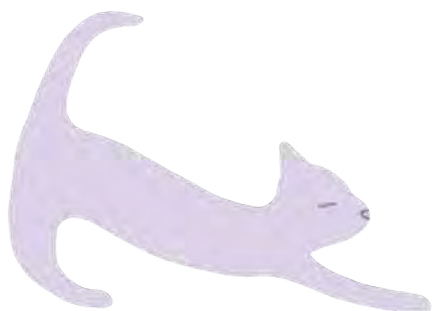
#### PLAN FOR FUN

My planning habits weren't a complete waste. As my husband and I planned our beach vacation one year, I thought it would be fun to incorporate some educational "fun" into the holiday. I researched places we could visit and took note of the hours of operation and how much

each activity cost so I would be prepared. Boy, was I glad I took the time to do that for more than one reason! First of all, the weather upon arrival was terrible. A small hurricane was coming through, and the first few days were rainy and gross. We visited every place I had planned, and I learned something along the way. The kids had a ton of fun! They were excited about what they were learning. They collected all the brochures they could to take home and learn even more. They asked the guides questions. That's when it dawned on me that I had been taking their education too seriously. Education is important, but it needs to be fun as well. Once we got home, I needed to keep the fun going and see what else we could do. You can do this too.

If you want to incorporate more fun into your school days, it might require a little planning. Look up future lesson plans for your kids. If there is a historical site within driving distance that would help them get a better understanding of the lessons, set up a field trip. We happen to live near several Civil War sites, so when that came up in history, we took a day here and there to get outside and have fun learning in the field.





## STRETCH YOURSELVES

Think about what your kids are interested in. Do they bring home every stray animal that crosses their path? Call a local vet to see if your child can shadow them for a day. Depending on the age of your children, they may be able to work a couple of days a week for the vet to get more experience and see if they might want to make it a career. Some hospitals have days where students can shadow medical staff. Writing essays or creating reports on their experiences can help develop grammar and spelling skills while writing about something they enjoy.

Find out if there are any classes you and your child can take together. Look for art classes, cooking classes, sewing classes, or anything else your children have shown an interest in. Doing these classes together is fun and breaks up the monotony of the school day. If possible, make it a family affair. Community colleges often offer these types of classes. If you don't have anything like this nearby, there is always YouTube. There are so many teaching videos online to help expand your children's knowledge (and yours!) in a fun way. Look up videos on painting, drawing, cooking, sewing, music, or whatever else you can think of.

Subscription boxes can also be a fun way for the entire family to learn about different cultures, foods, or science. There are any number of boxes you can subscribe to that fit your family's needs and desires. Mix it up from time to time to expand their learning fun even further.

## BE SPONTANEOUS!

Don't be afraid to be spontaneous in your fun education as well. You can tell when your kids just aren't into their book work and neither are you. This is not to say that school should never have structure, but you can let loose once in a while. The first days of spring are perfect for this. Pack a picnic lunch and the schoolbooks, and go to a park where you know there are fun things to learn.

A friend who knew I homeschooled suggested I take my kids to the Old City Cemetery in our hometown. I thought it was a strange suggestion . . . until I actually went! On a whim when spring fever was high, we decided to visit. There was so much history there that reinforced what they were already learning, especially about the Civil War. We walked through the cemetery and learned about the people buried there. There was a pest house where soldiers were tended. There were beautiful gardens where we spread a blanket, ate lunch, and completed homework. Sitting in the middle of a cemetery was definitely not what I envisioned our homeschooling looking like, but it was perfect and educational at the same time.

Whatever you do, don't make school all about book learning. Incorporating new activities gives your children a chance to learn in different ways. Seeing historical sites, geological landforms, flora and fauna in the field, and rural or urban landscapes like those they've read about reinforces their learning and this experiential knowledge will stay with them longer. Think outside the box a little bit, and you'll make learning more enjoyable for everyone.

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*Ruth O'Neil is a veteran homeschool mom who has been a freelance writer for more than 30 years, publishing hundreds of articles in dozens of publications as well as a few books. When she's not writing, she spends her spare time quilting, reading, scrapbooking, camping, and hiking with the family. Her newest project is a series of devotionals based on classic literature.*

[www.ruthoneilauthor.com](http://www.ruthoneilauthor.com)



# ADAPTING to HOMESCHOOLING ACROSS MULTIPLE HOUSEHOLDS

**H**omeschooling while working requires a lot of juggling, and homeschoolers often enlist the help of their extended families to make things work. Perhaps a homeschooling parent needs to travel on business or needs time to focus on their job, a new baby, an upcoming move, or another one of life's events, so someone else steps in to keep the homeschooling show on the road. Maybe two working parents stagger their job hours so they can share homeschooling duties. Sometimes divorce creates a situation where it's necessary to have homeschooling happen in two homes. How can homeschooling continue smoothly when two or more people are sharing homeschooling supervision? Whether your child is homeschooling some of the time at grandma's house, a neighbor's house, with a tutor, or in their second home with another parent, a little organization goes a long way toward keeping everyone coordinated and informed.

Here are some ideas from the Oak Meadow team about how to manage a smooth homeschooling transition and foster successful collaboration between multiple households.





### **1 CREATE A BOX FOR SCHOOLBOOKS THAT GOES BACK AND FORTH WITH THE CHILD.**

Find a box, sturdy wooden crate, or milk crate. All the school materials live in that box. The box goes wherever the kids are. Inevitably books get left at the other house, and somebody needs to go get them or deliver them, but it's easier if everything is in one box. Clothes can live in two places, if necessary, but schoolbooks have to be transferred back and forth, so the box helps.

Each child can have their own box. This works better than a backpack because it's easier to keep things organized and easy to find in a box, which acts as a sort of file cabinet. Books, folders for work, and a shoe box for school or craft supplies can all be stored neatly and easily in a crate. No more digging through a jumbled-up backpack for a wrinkled scrap of paper or a pencil that doesn't have its tip broken!

### **2 CREATE A "SHIP'S LOG" OR FAMILY NEWSPAPER TO KEEP EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE.**

Some families find daily updates very helpful for unifying their approaches. It could be as simple as a little chart with spaces for "What We Did Today" and "What Needs to Be Done Next."

In fact, students can help produce these updates, which is a great way for them to see what they have accomplished and what still needs to be done. It could be written in journal format as a daily "ship's log." Another idea is to create a weekly or ongoing family newspaper that reports what is happening in their little homeschooling world. Many assignments would likely work well as "articles" for the family newsletter. This could turn into a great year-long writing project that serves as an information review for the students, too. The log or newsletter can either travel back and forth with the students or live online where families can check it.

### **3 SET REALISTIC GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS.**

Don't forget that there will be days when everything doesn't get done, so be prepared to make room for what still needs doing the next day. Be flexible!

It is fine if the student does different kinds of work while at different households—maybe one parent loves science and math and the other prefers the humanities—but it should be clear to all parties what work is being done and when. And don't overload one party with the "hard" assignments. Make sure the student has fun time with each household.

### **4 SET UP GOOD COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS.**

Create a checklist that shows which assignments are planned for each week, and have the student and/or supervising adult check off assignments as they are completed. Make sure everyone knows where to put the completed assignments so they are easily retrievable by all who need to see them. Some families like to send emails about what was done, how the student did it, and what they might need more help with; others use a notebook that goes back and forth with the student.

If you are working with a supervising teacher or school, make sure they have a clear understanding of how to contact both parties and who is responsible for what. Make sure that everyone understands the school's expectations of how and when to submit work, how to communicate with the teacher, etc.

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The bottom line? Communication is key when homeschooling across multiple households. Set up systems that everyone can be successful with—that's the best way for all the adults involved to support the children they love.



# BUILDING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE HOMESCHOOL: A CONSTANT, ONGOING PROCESS

BY JAIME HERNDON

When people find out that I homeschool, especially as I've moved into a mix of Montessori and Charlotte Mason methods, a lot of assumptions are made. These assumptions are usually about my religion, political beliefs, and reasons for homeschooling—and they're almost always all wrong.

Building a diverse and inclusive curriculum has been important to me from the start, and I saw it as one of the benefits of homeschooling. Even when my son was in preschool, I was frustrated by the lack of diversity in the books the teachers read and the unwillingness to make even a small effort to be diverse and inclusive. Thankfully, the preschool director was receptive and provided plenty

of diverse books, but time and time again, the teachers would always choose the same ones.

It's also very personal: as a Jewish family and a parent of a disabled child, providing representation for my son—good representation and joyful representation—is important to me. But it doesn't need to be personal to be important. Anyone can do it. I am not an anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) expert by any means. For expert guidance, I defer to Britt Hawthorne, Liz Kleinrock, and Tiffany Jewell, and highly encourage you to follow all of them on Instagram. But I can share what I've done to create a diverse and inclusive homeschool for my son.



I knew I wanted to provide my son with a homeschool education rooted in ABAR principles and frameworks. I searched out ABAR educators on Instagram (including Liz Kleinrock and Britt Hawthorne), pored over websites such as [Learning For Justice](#), and read books from [RethinkingSchools.org](#). I followed a broad array of organizations and went on their websites to read more. I took stock of what I didn't know, what I needed to unlearn, and what I needed to work on.

Every year, I create a monthly calendar in my homeschool commonplace notebook and list all the holidays from various religions, various awareness days, notable days in history, and heritage and history months. I make a note of what themes and topics I might want to get books on from the library, and my son and I will read these books together, talk about them, and maybe do some coloring sheets or worksheets about the holiday, person, or event. It's important to me to find books written by someone from whatever culture, ethnicity, community, or religion we are learning about, or someone with lived experience of an event or disability. When it comes to crafts, I'm careful about the activities we do so that we do not participate in cultural appropriation or disrespect. I'm also careful not to limit stories from various cultural and ethnic communities to a certain month. While I make note of these months and dates, we don't limit our diverse reading, viewing, or activities to these months.

Representation is important, especially with Jewish representation, which often gets conflated with Holocaust stories. This is why I feel the need to add this caveat: it's important to have joyful representation, too. Just as I would implore someone not to limit their child's exposure to Jewish stories to Holocaust books, I also make sure that we aren't only learning about the struggles of marginalized communities. Whatever book you choose, it doesn't always have to be An Issue Book. There can be incidental representation, which is just as important. Books with Black joy, Jewish joy, Muslim joy, Asian joy, LGBTQIA+ joy, disabled joy, and so forth are all extremely valuable.

Whatever we study, I always think about who's telling the stories we're reading and whose stories are being told. Who wrote the books we're using? Whose stories are we not hearing? Is this the same narrative I was taught in

school, or is there more depth to it now? What is the dominant narrative in the text? What stereotypes are being shown or reinforced, if any? If I'm using a well-known curriculum, I look at who's talking about it on social media, what people have to say about it, and who's not saying a word. That's not to say I only buy curricula that others talk about, but I think it's worth noting the larger conversations around it, especially if I'm not familiar with the company or subject curriculum.

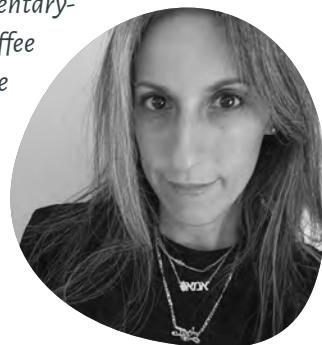
If you don't know where to get started, start small:

- Search for other homeschoolers on Instagram from a variety of backgrounds and households. Follow them, engage with them, and take note of the books they read.
- Follow diverse bookstagrammers. Some of my favorites are [@storiesofcolor](#), [@noodlenutskidsbooks](#), [@hereweeread](#), and [@heritagemomblog](#).
- Read diverse books for yourself, and start logging your stats. At first, you might be surprised at how much your reading list lacks diversity, not because you don't care but because of publishing trends, publicity trends, and habits. Push yourself to read widely and diversely to learn about other cultures and communities.

I am still learning, relearning, and constantly revising and evaluating—this is a continuous process, not a one-time thing. This is what's worked for me so far. How do you build a diverse and inclusive homeschool?

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*Jaime Herndon is a single-mom-by-choice, a science writer and editor, and also homeschools her elementary-age son. She drinks way too much coffee and enjoys hiking, learning about the national parks with her son, and reading too many books at one time. You can follow her homeschool adventures on Instagram at [@thedisruptivehomeschooler](#).*



# TURNING "I CAN'T" INTO "I CAN": 6 TIPS FOR TACKLING CHALLENGES



BY ERIN SHELBY

If learning is a journey, bumps in the road are inevitable. Every kid is bound to encounter a challenge at some point. Sometimes, these struggles quickly sort themselves out. Other times, the answers don't come so easily.

There's power in knowing that others are facing similar challenges. There are some learning difficulties that are so common that they have tried-and-true solutions. Here are a few of the most common learning challenges, along with tips for overcoming them.

## CHALLENGE #1: "I'M OVERWHELMED!"

Have you felt overwhelmed recently? It's frustrating to not know where to start with an important project. Feeling overwhelmed impacts kids, too. Do you know how to spot this problem? Young kids might express their frustration verbally with phrases like "This is too hard," or "I can't," or "I don't want to." And teenagers? They may copy our behavior when we feel overwhelmed. Does procrastination sound familiar? Yup, that's a red flag that your teen might be feeling overwhelmed.

These feelings don't magically resolve in adulthood. Developing strategies to work through feeling overwhelmed is important. It's a skill that will serve them throughout their lives.

One of the most practical ways to do this is to show how a large task can be broken down into smaller, more achievable tasks. These mini-goals are perfect for achieving something when you're feeling overwhelmed

or tired. If you want to teach life skills, teach your child how to create mini-goals.

For example, if a young child is overwhelmed by the idea of completing an entire worksheet, why not encourage them to just focus on the first problem? When they've conquered this first problem, they've conquered their first mini-goal. Encourage them to reach success by simply starting somewhere.

Encouraging a mindset of creating mini-goals can help older students, too. Older students may become overwhelmed when they face longer, more complex reading material, especially if it is dry and dull. Tackling it can seem like an impossible task. Instead of focusing on the end goal—reading the entire chapter, for instance—have your student focus on just reading and taking notes on one page. This is the mini-goal. When that's complete, set another goal of reading the next page. Repeating this cycle of creating and achieving mini-goals will encourage a mindset of "I can" rather than "I can't."

## CHALLENGE #2: "I DON'T LIKE TO READ"

Some kids spend all their free time reading, while others loathe it. It's important to get to the root of the problem and determine a disinterest in reading is due to inability or simply a lack of interest.

Kids who truly struggle with reading may need to develop their confidence. This can happen through helping them achieve smaller wins. Encourage them to pick their own reading materials whenever possible. Graphic novels can also be helpful because they can help kids imagine what's happening in the story.

And don't forget that reading can happen without a book. There are lots of high-quality magazines that will help kids build their reading skills while also allowing them to read for smaller amounts of time. All around, this can help increase their reading confidence and their overall academic performance.

## CHALLENGE #3: "I DON'T LIKE TO WRITE"

Have you ever needed to prepare a speech, tell a loved one how important they are to you, or write a thank-you note? Capturing your thoughts, choosing the right words, and conveying your feelings are all reasons why we write.

To some, writing comes naturally. To others, the skill



needs to be developed over time. Does your student struggle with writing? Here are a few ways to develop strength in this area:

- **Free writing:** At the same time every day, the student writes. Set a timer for a short amount of time—anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes is fine. During this time, the student writes about any topic of their choosing, and this work is not graded.
- **Daily prompts:** Another way to enhance writing skills is to create a daily prompt to provide inspiration before they start. The prompt could be a word, a season, a holiday, or anything else. The writing will be related to the prompt, and you can choose whether or not to critique it.
- **Motivational tools:** Make the process fun with various writing tools. Students can use fun writing pens, pencils, different types of notebooks, and different colors of paper.

#### CHALLENGE #4:

##### **"IT'S TOO PRETTY TO STAY INSIDE"**

Beautiful weather can create a big distraction. Is lovely weather making it hard for your kids to focus on their studies? Don't work against this obstacle—embrace it and enjoy it!

If the leaves are changing colors and falling from the trees, go outside to observe these changes. Research the process of how leaves lose their colors, and schedule some seasonal field trips to take advantage of the time. Plan to have some lessons outside while the weather's good.

Silent reading can easily be done outside. Other activities, such as watching videos on a laptop, can also be done outside, as long as you have Wi-Fi access.

#### CHALLENGE #5: **"I'LL NEVER USE THIS"**

Kids might wonder, "Why should I care about learning this?" This feeling can arise when they don't understand how they will use certain skills or knowledge in the future. This can lead to an impression that a lesson or a topic is "useless information."

As much as you can, try to find ways to connect what they're learning to what they're interested in. Creating these connections can make students more invested in what they're learning. For example, kids that are passionate about creative fields like fashion design,

theater, or music, may not see how math or history relates to what they love, but the connections are there. Can you help them find these connections? The high schooler who aspires to own her own clothing line someday needs to know about finance so she can manage the money of her future business. The young person who wants to be a professional actor needs to know about history because it will help them accurately portray characters from different eras. These are just a few examples of how students can become more motivated in subjects that, while seemingly unrelated at first, are connected to future goals.

#### CHALLENGE #6: **"I'M BORED"**

Boredom can set in if students aren't challenged enough. For teens with high test scores, skipping a grade may be a common option. And these teens might even consider graduating early.

Some students are too bored for high school but not quite ready to enroll in college classes. They may want to enjoy time with friends who are at their age level as well as activities that they can enjoy with their peers. Online learning platforms (such as Coursera, Khan Academy, and edX) can offer a great solution. Many are free and offer a variety of different classes. This can be a great way for teens to bridge the gap between high school and college. These options allow learners to take a course at their own pace. You might decide to learn something, too!

Every learning journey has its challenges, but the experience is ultimately worthwhile. Success doesn't always come at the first attempt, and many kids experience similar types of learning challenges. With a little bit of knowledge, inspiration, and motivation, every child can jump over a learning hurdle.

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*Erin Shelby is a former public school music educator. Her work has appeared in Music-K8 magazine, and she has previously written for Living Education. An active blogger, she regularly contributes to StartUp Mindset, a top 50 entrepreneurship blog. [erinshelby.wordpress.com](http://erinshelby.wordpress.com)*



CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT:

# GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

The theme for this issue is Adapt, Customize, and Thrive, and these are abilities that humanity needs as we collectively face and work to mitigate climate change. The following activities give a taste of what students will explore in our high school course, Global Climate Change.



TAKE A  
PEEK  
INSIDE!



### **ACTIVITY: ADAPTATION PLAN VISUAL**

In this activity, you will draw and label a visual of the adaptation strategies that would be beneficial in a location you choose. First, choose an area you are familiar with, such as your home (or you could design a new home near where you live), your town, part of your city, or a nearby park or wilderness area. Use the reading and outside research to identify five or more adaptation strategies that would help the area be resilient to climate change. These strategies should be specific to where you live—if your area is far from the ocean, then your community does not need a barrier for storm surges! Your visual could take the form of a map, blueprints, drawings, or even a 3D diorama. As always, your work will be assessed on effort and ideas, not aesthetics. Your visual should include labels that identify each adaptation strategy and what it is doing. Make sure to submit citations for any outside research you do.

### **ACTIVITY: PERSEVERANCE AND HOPE ART**

A focus of this course has been how to be resilient and active in the face of the challenges and even hopelessness that climate change can create. Make a creative piece that explores perseverance and hope in the face of climate change. You might create a drawing, painting, sculpture, story, poem, dance, film, or work in another art form. Submit an image or recording of your creative piece with a few sentences explaining the intent behind it.

### **ACTIVITY: ADAPTATION VERSUS MITIGATION DEBATE**

If you chose the debate activity in lesson 16, this week you will use your research to conduct your debate. The debate topic: Given the limits of available resources for addressing climate change, should we prioritize adaptation or mitigation strategies?

Before you begin the debate, review your notes. Then, go over the format of the debate with whoever you are debating against. For instance, you might have opening statements for each side, then take turns giving at least three counterarguments. You may also want to talk to your debate opponent about the debate norms and etiquette you both agree to follow, such as no interrupting, debating ideas not each other, etc. Conduct your debate, and then write a one-paragraph reflection that addresses the following points:

- Overall, how did your debate go in terms of the arguments made and ideas discussed?
- What is your personal opinion on the debate question? (This may or may not align with the single-focus argument you presented for debate purposes.)
- Which arguments do you find most convincing in this issue? Cite evidence presented during the debate, either by you or your opponent.

# HOMESCHOOL SUCCESS, OUR WAY

BY STACEY WELLS

When our youngest daughter was midway through her third-grade year of public school, we decided it would be best to pull her out and start our homeschooling journey. It turned out to be one of the best decisions we'd ever made! But like many other new homeschooling families, we had to make some adjustments, try new things, and learn from failures when they happened. Of course, we'd all like to think we can "hit the ground running," but the truth is, it sometimes takes time to find what works. And that's okay!

I gave in to the temptation early on to do school at home with the same schedule and routine as public school. But it wasn't until I realized we could customize homeschooling to fit our daughter's needs that we really started to see great results. For instance, we found that she felt and worked better if we let her sleep an extra hour in the morning. We started a little later, but we worked a little later too, so we never fell behind on any of our work.

## STARTING WITH SOME DECOMPRESSION

When it became apparent that "school at home" wouldn't work for our family, we paused for a bit and deschooled. Deschooling is a process that gently moves a child from the standard educational style to a place where learning becomes enjoyable without the institutionalized feel. It was like a breath of fresh air as we moved into a place where we could enjoy the learning process.

As this part of our journey ended, we started to consider all the curriculum options and realized how overwhelming it felt at first. Choosing from so many options was a learning process for me, as a homeschool mom, to understand my daughter's learning style and

how best to help her achieve mastery of subjects. And we quickly discovered that just because you purchase and plan a specific curriculum option, you don't have to stick with it for an entire year if it's not working. Can I just tell you this was a huge breakthrough for our family?

## ENJOYING THE SUCCESSES

As the fourth-grade year drew to a close, I took a very eclectic approach to homeschooling, turning to various curriculum options for the best results. We used books and videos for science, which was a favorite for our daughter, and we found that she overcame test anxiety when we allowed her to use narration for the answers. I continued to take advantage of narration at every opportunity throughout the rest of her homeschool journey, and it was a lifesaver, time and again.

Another success came after struggling to the point of tears with learning math. Our daughter was so down on herself for "being dumb," and I couldn't believe that all the approaches I had tried were failures. I was starting to think that she might need some remedial help, but that wasn't the case. So, remembering that she is a very analytical thinker, thriving on details and instruction, I looked for a math book with more words than numbers. What do I mean by that? I mean, I wanted to find a math book that explained, in great detail, how to work the problems, why they were performed in a specific way, and how to go back over all the steps if the answer was wrong. I was absolutely thrilled when I finally found it! The book's title is *The Philosophy of Mathematics*, translated from the *Cours De Philosophie Positive* of Auguste Comte by W. M. Gillespie in 1851. With chapter titles such as "General Considerations on Mathematical





Science,” “The Object of Mathematics,” and “True Definition of Mathematics,” it was exactly what she needed. In fact, we spent half the year taking in the information this book poured out to her, which made a whole world of difference. Did she start loving math? No, but she did come to understand it. She gained confidence in that knowledge and became a stellar math student.

### **HOMESCHOOL BECOMES A LIFESTYLE**

After homeschooling for a few more years, learning became a part of everyday life, and we loved it! We shifted to year-round schooling because we’d found that learning never stops. Not during holiday vacations, family vacations, Thanksgiving, or Christmas. One summer, we traveled to Bardstown, Kentucky to My Old Kentucky Home State Park, where we camped over the Fourth of July weekend. For four days, we used a unit-study method to take advantage of this remarkable and historical place. We were able to cover math, reading, science, social studies, and history as we visited the Home of Three Governors, the Pioneer Graveyard, a one-room schoolhouse cabin, and the outdoor amphitheater, where they held live performances every weekend.

We homeschooled much the same way during the holidays and summer breaks, taking our time with the joy of learning. It became something that our daughter looked forward to, especially as she got older. Throughout her high school years, there were many days when she chose to start school later than usual and was often still working on lessons at 11 p.m. But it worked for her, and she graduated with a 3.86 GPA and a love of learning that no one could ever take away.

### **I WANT TO ENCOURAGE YOU**

If you’re new to homeschooling, my best advice is to give yourself and your child or children plenty of grace. Learning isn’t a one-size-fits-all, even though it would sure be a lot less stressful if it were! Be willing to try different approaches, curricula, teaching styles, and schedules. Find out what your child’s learning preferences are, and consider year-round schooling if you live in a state that allows it. I know it may not seem like it, but it gives you so much more breathing room.

If you’ve already spent a couple of years homeschooling, and you’re starting to feel burned out, I want to encourage you, too, because I was you! I thought about throwing in the towel but changed everything instead. If it wasn’t working, I tossed it and found something new to replace it with. And when you allow yourself the freedom to find what truly works for your child and your family, you will be so delighted that you did.

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*Stacey Wells is a former homeschooling mom who has turned over 15 years of homeschooling experience into a homeschool consultation and advocacy business.*

*You can find out more at her website, [www.truthinlearningacademy.com](http://www.truthinlearningacademy.com).*

*She and her husband live in Greeneville, TN, with their two grown children, enjoying homesteading, travel, and ministry work.*



\*AUTUMN CRAFT\*

# GIFTS *in* JARS

There's always a gift-giving occasion around the corner, and it's especially fun to make and receive homemade gifts. Try the two activities below from *Gifts in Jars* by Oak Meadow's own Natalie Wise—these gifts are sure to be crowd-pleasers!

For more fun from Natalie, check out her book *Hot Cocoa Bombs*.

## LENTIL-CURRY SOUP MIX

Soup jars make such a good holiday gift for anyone in your life. Not only are they pretty; they're sure to be appreciated on a cold winter's night when soup sounds just right, but something quick and easy is needed. Buy your ingredients in the bulk section and use a funnel to make creating these gifts even simpler.

Makes: 1 jar, 4–6 servings

Jar size: 1 pint

**How to Assemble:** Layer the ingredients in the order given, placing the freeze-dried apple slices on top just under the lid.

**Tag Instructions:** Empty mix into soup pot and add 3 jars full (6 cups) of water. Simmer for 30 minutes or until lentils are tender.

### Ingredients:

- 1 cup green lentils
- 2 tablespoons curry powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon celery salt
- 2 tablespoons dried basil
- 1 cup red lentils
- 3 slices freeze-dried apples





## MONSTER BROWNIE MIX

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These brownies are perfect to keep on hand when a craving hits. There's hardly anything to making them, and in minutes you'll have a gooey, peanut-buttery, chocolatey, nutty treat warm from the oven. These are a takeoff on the classic Monster cookie, which has every tasty treat packed in it. It's a lucky friend who receives this pretty—and yummy—brownie mix.

Makes: 1 mix for a 9x9-inch pan of brownies

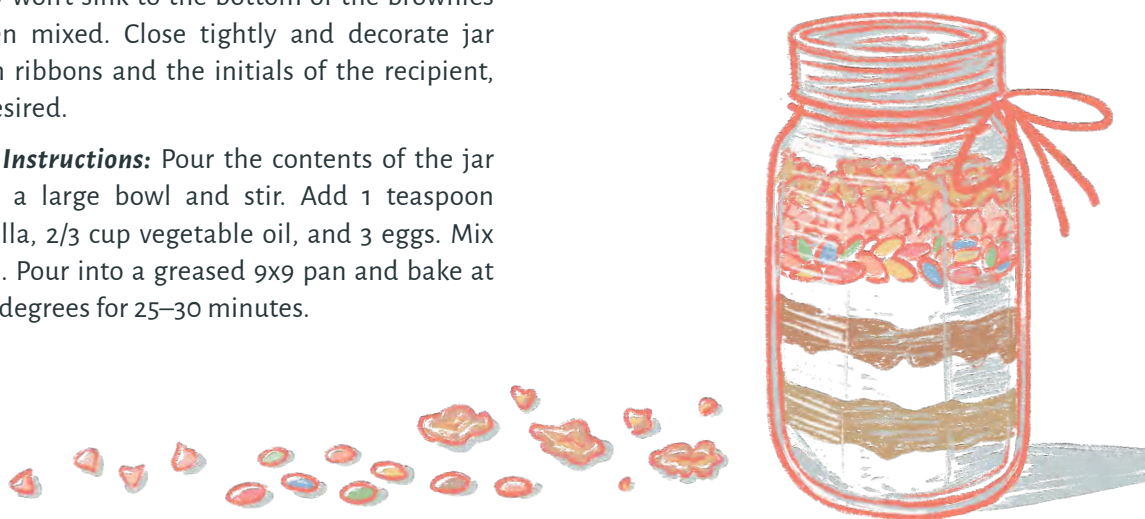
Jar size: 1 quart

**How to Assemble:** Layer the ingredients in the jar in the order listed. At the end, toss the nuts with the additional 2 tablespoons of flour so they won't sink to the bottom of the brownies when mixed. Close tightly and decorate jar with ribbons and the initials of the recipient, if desired.

**Tag Instructions:** Pour the contents of the jar into a large bowl and stir. Add 1 teaspoon vanilla,  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup vegetable oil, and 3 eggs. Mix well. Pour into a greased 9x9 pan and bake at 350 degrees for 25–30 minutes.

### Ingredients:

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cocoa powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup packed brown sugar
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup white sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup colored chocolate candies
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup peanut butter baking chips
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup nuts
- 2 tablespoons flour







Wherever your  
student is going,  
Oak Meadow can  
get them there.

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