

# The Unit Study Idea Book

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## **Dedication**

**T**his book is dedicated to my loving husband, Bruce, and my five wonderful children, who are also my friends, students, and often my instructors!

My children's names and ages at the time of publication (1992) are as follows: Michelle, 12 years old; Melissa, 10 years old; Robert, 8 years old; Raymond, 6 years old; and Mandy, 2 years old.

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## Introduction

**T**his book is meant to be a book of ideas, not a curriculum guide. It is my hope that my ideas will serve as a catalyst to begin a chain reaction which will fuel your own ideas. Each one of us views things a little differently, and therefore we will be inspired to take a variety of avenues in our educational endeavors. This book is not meant to be exhaustive by any means, only inspiring and encouraging.

Many suggestions are given for each topic. Use only the suggestions that appeal to you. Your success will be greater if you enjoy what you are doing. Take one step at a time, not rushing through one project or task just to begin another. Realize that completing even *one* section or *one* project is a tremendous accomplishment. One single aspect of a unit is valuable and can stand on its own merits.

You will never be able to exhaust any given topic. Our Heavenly Father created such a vast and complex universe that even in a thousand lifetimes we could never learn all there is to know. Fortunately we are not limited by our lives here on earth, but have eternity to devote to our quest for knowledge of the Holy One and all that His works encompass.

It should be our desire to acquaint our children with a variety of ideas, people, and places. There is no set curriculum that should be imposed on all children. Children are individuals, and therefore their studies should be tailored to meet their particular needs and desires. Our Lord has given parents charge over their children, and therefore we are our children's best curriculum designers. Our studies should not focus on our interest areas alone. Rather, areas of interest are broadened as we dare to investigate unexplored topics. However, our emphasis in these new study areas can be centered on those disciplines we favor most.

I have chosen to compile this book in a very simple manner. As I plan units throughout the year, I try to choose topics from a variety of subject areas. Although a number of content areas are integrated into each unit, the main thrust of a particular unit lies in a specific area. For example, I choose units primarily based on history, geography, science, math, fine arts, or literature. Each unit is written in a manner to encompass one content area. I feel that selecting from a variety of key study areas enables us to achieve a well-rounded course of study.

It is my observation that many unit study curriculums overextend themselves as they try to integrate every discipline into each unit of study. This is often forced, and therefore the material integrated does not always make sense or truly benefit the study. It does not require the integration of all the content areas to be a valuable study. Some studies naturally lend themselves well to the integration of several content areas. I find that only a well-planned, uninspiring, no-room-for-creative-input, type of unit study can satisfactorily integrate every subject. So stop worrying about your children getting their daily shot in the arm of math, science, history,

language, art, music, geography, and spelling. Let us get on with real learning and real life that is not compartmentalized into digestible doses of mediocrity. Still worried that your children will be lacking if they miss out on all these content areas? We must realize that the educational leaders in our society are trying to press our children into a mold to acquire the same (boring) skills. These skills have been allowed to overshadow true knowledge. Break the mold and allow a masterpiece to emerge!

Remember that this is only a book of ideas. Use your heart and mind to discern the path your family should take. Education does not need to be a complicated process, only a thoughtful one. May the Lord bless you in your desire to raise children for His glory.

Please use the margins in this book to make notes and to include a listing of additional books you discover as you compile materials for your unit study.

## Suggestions for Making this Book Easier to Use

I encourage you to read my first book, *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*, before attempting to use this book. It will provide you with pertinent information which will help you to receive the full benefit from this unit study idea book.

Although suggested library books are given for each unit, they are not meant to be a stumbling block in the event that you cannot locate some of them. In my book *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*, a section is included on “Using the Library” along with a “Library Reference Guide.” The information given will enable you to find books from your own library that pertain to each unit. Do not waste valuable time trying to locate books not owned by your library system. Use books available to you.

You may want to buy some books or materials to supplement your unit studies. Although it would be ideal to rely totally on your public library as a source for materials, this cannot always be done. However, if you are not buying textbooks and workbooks each year, it is easier to accommodate these occasional purchases.

I strongly urge you to buy *Books Children Love*, by Elizabeth Wilson. This is a fabulous resource for locating interesting and morally sound books relating to your topic of study. I have had good success in finding the books in my public library that are suggested in *Books Children Love*.

In this book of ideas, I list several activities and projects. This listing is meant to be a sampling from which you may choose. Do not try to undertake every suggestion. Too many activities and projects can be frustrating. Pace yourself, and most of all relax and enjoy your family!

**LITERATURE**

## Library Unit

This is a good unit to help you and your children get acquainted with the library. You may also want to arrange a guided tour of your public library. Try to visit the largest branch in your area, as they will have the most services available.

Some churches maintain a library which is open to the general public for a small annual fee. Many homeschool support groups offer memberships for their lending libraries. As more people join, more materials can be purchased.

### Library Books

*I Took My Frog to the Library*, by Eric A. Kimmel; *Book! Book! Book!*, by Deborah Bruss; *The Silver Balloon*, by Susan Bonners; and *Can You Guess Where We are Going?* by Elvira Woodruff are delightful picture books with a library theme. *Libraries and You*, by Pekay Shor. *Libraries and How to Use Them*, by Jeanne Hardendorff. *Check It Out! The Book about Libraries*, by Gail Gibbons. *Let's Visit the Library*, by Marianne Johnston. *The Way Things Work*, by David Macaulay, contains information about the printing press and book binding. *Learning about Books and Libraries: A Gold Mine of Games*, by Carol K. Lee and Janet Langford offers 47 games for K– 6th grade to acquaint children with books and the library. *The Inside-Outside Book of Libraries*, by Julie Cummins. *Library: From Ancient Scrolls to the World Wide Web*, by John Malam. *Most Beautiful Libraries in the World*, by Guillaume de Laubier offers lavish photos of libraries world wide as well as text tracing the history of libraries to the present day. *The Library in America: A Celebration in Words and Pictures*, by Paul Dickson presents the history of the public library in America. My favorite photo is the one of the first horse-drawn book wagon operated by a public library.

### History

In 2700 B.C., the **Sumerians** established libraries to house tablets. One of the most famous of these libraries was built by the Babylonians in Nineveh. **Ptolemy I** established a library at Alexandria about 300 B.C. during the Greek rule in Egypt. **Eumenes II** (ruling from 197-159 B.C.) established a library at Pergamum, in northwest Asia Minor. By the 2nd century A.D., there were more than 25 public libraries in Rome. During invasions of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century, many libraries were burned.

Monasteries served as safeguards for culture and education. Read about **St. Benedict** during the Dark Ages. During the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, many universities were founded and libraries were needed. It was difficult to obtain books because hand-copying was slow. Many books were chained to the shelves as they were extremely valuable. Later, **Johann Gutenberg** (1398?-1468), a German inventor developed moveable type and later the printing press. This made it possible to print large quantities of books at affordable prices. He printed the Gutenberg Bible in

1456. The Vatican Library was founded in the 15th century by **Pope Nicholas V.** **Reverend John Harvard** began the library at Harvard College. In 1731, Benjamin Franklin began a subscription library. **The Library of Congress** in Washington, D.C., was founded in 1800. The first free public libraries did not come about until the 19th century and were supported by taxes. As early as 1910, the first motorized bookmobiles were delivering reading material to people in rural communities.

Read about **Melvil Dewey**, a librarian who worked out a number system used in many libraries today. It is called the Dewey Decimal Classification System. There is another classification scheme used called the Library of Congress Classification. You may wish to zero in on a couple of individuals during this study, such as Gutenberg and Dewey by reading biographies about these individuals. The rest can be summarized by reading about the history of libraries in an encyclopedia.

### Terminology

Use the glossary in a library book such as *Libraries and You*, by Shor, or use a dictionary to define the following terms before you advance in the unit study. Children may write the term on one side of an index card and the definition on the other side. These terms are: author card, bibliography, biography, call number, card catalog, Dewey Decimal number, fiction, index, Library of Congress, nonfiction, periodical, subject card, table of contents, and title card.

### Activities

Visit your local library and have your children make a map of the interior. Have them include sections for fiction, nonfiction, easy readers, biographies, fine arts, fairy tales, records, audio cassettes, video cassettes, paintings, periodical indexes, computers, and so on. Also remind them to put in restrooms, tables, chairs, display cases, etc. If your children are young or your library is large, you may want to have your children only map out the youth department. This pictorial representation should help to familiarize them with the layout of the library.

Schedule an appointment with the librarian at your local branch to have him or her explain the library's computer system to you and your children. Your library's computer will contain information on the library's annual financial report; the members of the library board; branch locations and hours; services available — story times, book mobiles, and computer labs to name a few; the library catalog; and the history of the public library in your area.

### Library Skills

Teach your children to read numbers containing several decimal places. Give them a list of such numbers to put in numerical order. Check out a number of books from each section of the youth department of your

public library. (Older students may choose books from other areas in the library as well.) Assign books to each child and have them make catalog cards for their books using 3x5 index cards. Show your children examples of the catalog cards found in one of the suggested library books.

(Although most public libraries use a computerized cataloging system nowadays, it is still fun and educational to complete this activity. It also helps the children understand how time consuming it was to locate library books only a few years ago!) Explain about author, title, and subject cards. Have them make an author, title, and subject card for each book. Some books may have more than one subject card. Help your children to determine the subject matter for each book. You will note that each type of card contains a brief description of the book. If your children have not read the books, they can read the inside front jacket flap for information about the book. A list of subject matter contained within each book is usually found on the copyright page as well.

Libraries vary in the arrangement of their card catalogs. Commonly they have a separate catalog for the subject cards, and the author and title cards are located in one catalog. Let each child take a turn at alphabetizing the cards they have made. You may want to combine all the cards, or separate them into groups by author, title, and subject before alphabetizing.

Once you have done this, your children may want to play “library.” They can take turns “checking out” books. Place a slip of paper in the back of each book to be stamped when it is checked out. The children can also make their own library cards. All the activities mentioned above can be done with books you own as well as with library books. Use the Dewey Decimal Classification System (found in one of your library books on using the library) to determine call numbers. Remember, fiction as well as easy readers are classified by the author’s last name.

Have each child make a book jacket to accompany his favorite book. These can be placed in your “library display case.” The children can choose a book to read aloud and record on tape. A bell or musical instrument can be used to indicate that a page needs to be turned. This also provides hours of entertainment for toddlers who want to be read to frequently. They can listen to the tapes, and this will afford you extra time to help the older children with special schooling needs. A more complicated task would be to dramatize the story while making the tape. Children can be very creative when it comes to devising methods to simulate various sounds. Try it for fun sometime. You may find it helpful to check out a dramatized recording of a book from your library.

This is a good time to explain the parts of a book to your children. Begin with the cover or book jacket. Discuss the title, author, illustrator, and publisher. Point out that this information is on the spine of the book

as well, and if it is a library book, point out the call number, too. Explain that the front inside jacket cover gives a brief description of the book. The back inside jacket cover tells about the author and illustrator. Often the back outside cover will contain brief reviews of the book.

Examine the title page. If there are two title pages, compare them. Point out the copyright, Library of Congress number, publisher, and other information listed. Many books indicate whether the book is fiction, non-fiction, or a biography on the same page as the copyright. Discuss the dedication, introduction, preface, acknowledgements, etc. Talk about the table of contents, and have the children locate a desired chapter or section of the book. Discuss other significant parts of a book such as the appendix, bibliography, index, and glossary. Locate books that contain these different sections.

Most books begin page one as a right-hand page. See if you can find any exceptions. Choose a book with an index. Explain that this is a listing of information that can be found in this particular book; it is in alphabetical order. Select several topics for your children to locate using the index. Find a book containing several different indexes. A poetry volume is a good choice. Choose one with a subject, author, and title index. Some poetry volumes have first line indexes, as well.

Have the children locate poems relating to specific topics such as cats, lightning, mountains, etc. Then have them use the other indexes in the volume. Read several of the books that you have chosen to conduct this unit with your children. These may be factual books about the library, or they may be books you have chosen to “catalog.” Allow each child to select a book to be presented to the family as an oral narration. They can pretend they are the librarian giving a book talk.

You and your children can also make simple hand puppets and “act out” a book you have chosen. For simple-to-make, felt animal puppets see page 332 for information regarding my book *Successful Puppet Making*.

The children’s reference section is an interesting place to explore in your public library. For information concerning this, read the “Guide to the Reference Section of the Children’s Department of the Public Library” in my book *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*. This section will help you locate specific books pertaining to a particular unit study (see page 89).

## Children's Authors Unit

*In* my book, *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*, I included a sample of a children's authors unit we did a few years ago. Since that time, we have done several children's authors units in conjunction with my children writing and illustrating their own books. Studying various authors, their writing styles, their works, and their lives has given my children a wealth of information to draw from in creating their own books. We also studied select illustrators, including some author-illustrators. I have seen vast improvement in my children's writing and drawing. Vocabulary is more vivid, storylines are more involved and interesting, and more attention is given to details. Their drawings show more skill, effort, and imagination.

The books developed by the children are carefully made, using art quality paper, markers, paints, cardboard for stiffening covers, fabric for decorative covers, and button thread for hand sewing the bindings. Six full weeks are taken to complete this project. The reward for this diligence is a collection of books that will be treasured for a lifetime. Yearbooks such as these provide a record of the children's progress and achievements. These books are something they can be proud of and will make a handsome addition to their portfolios.

I encourage you to assist your children in making professional quality, handmade books. Over the years we have made a variety of books using a number of book-making manuals. Since these manuals are written for the traditional classroom, I find that some of them are difficult to adapt to my homeschool classroom. Some of these books present a secular philosophy of education that is contrary to my biblical philosophy of education.

After gaining several years of experience in making books with my children, I decided to write my own book-making manual entitled, *Creating Books with Children*. (See page 331 for more information.) This book is written as a six-week book-making unit study, and it includes reproductions from more than 50 books made by homeschooled children. The book chapters include:

- Week One:** Pre-Writing Activities
- Week Two:** Writing the Stories
- Week Three:** Text Layout and Editing
- Week Four:** Illustrating the Books
- Week Five:** Developing the Beginning and  
Ending Pages and the Book Jackets
- Week Six:** Assembling the Books

There are other books designed to help you make less complicated books. A book that we have used and enjoyed is *How to Make Books with Children*, published by the Evan-Moor Corporation. This book is to

be used primarily with young children. *Creating Books with Children* can be adapted for use with all ages. For example, the younger children can dictate their stories to Mom or an older sibling. This is a helpful tip for any child who cannot write or who finds writing laborious.

Even young children can assist in putting the books together and learn much about the mechanics of book assembly. Additional information about book binding can be found in David Macaulay's book, *The Way Things Work*. It also includes an explanation of the printing press. In *Creating Books with Children*, I stress that the final stories should be typed, resulting in a more professional looking product. My capable children type their stories as well as assist me in typing the younger children's stories. This affords them extra typing practice, and it helps me out considerably. If you do not own a computer, word processor, or typewriter, then consider investing in one. Typing skills are important and can be learned on a typewriter (preferably electric). Later these skills can be transferred over to use on a computer. If necessary, you can hire someone, maybe a fellow homeschooler, to type your children's stories.

This past year we chose to study two European children's authors. We studied Robert Louis Stevenson and Hans Christian Andersen. Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Scotland in 1850. We read his famous novel, *Treasure Island*, in an unabridged form. Although the language was somewhat complicated, the children enjoyed the book, especially my two boys. I read this book aloud to the children, and my two older girls occasionally read aloud also. We watched the movie *Treasure Island* and compared it with the book. We also checked out some library books on boats, as we encountered many navigational terms during our readings. We briefly studied pirates, using the *Pirates and Buccaneers Coloring Book* by Dover Publications, Inc. This interesting book includes pictures and historical information on pirates, buccaneers, and privateers.

We produced a video of an excerpt from *Treasure Island* entitled, "What I Heard in the Apple Barrel." This selection was found in the book *Play a Part*, by Bernice Carlson. Each child helped cut out and sew the costumes. My oldest daughter Michelle filmed the production and my daughter Melissa was the narrator. My two boys along with two other homeschooled boys made up the cast. The boys copied some of their lines from the play as a writing activity.

While studying Robert Louis Stevenson, we also read his book, *A Child's Garden of Verses*. Each child chose a number of poems to read aloud. The children copied some of these poems from the book, and I verbally dictated several other poems to the children, which they wrote in their notebooks. I had the children make a list of words relating to childhood. Then they found rhyming words for each word in their list. Following this activity, they wrote poems about childhood and illustrated their

poems. My girls then typed the poems and we glued them onto their illustrations.

I could not find a suitable biography about Stevenson, so we read the biographical information found in our encyclopedia. It was interesting to find that he became a proficient writer in his youth because he practiced “day in and day out.” Wherever he went he carried two books, one to read and another to write in.

We also studied Hans Christian Andersen. We read a biography of his life that was very interesting entitled, *The Story of Hans Christian Andersen, Swan of Denmark*, by Ruth Manning-Sanders. We read many of his works which are located with the fairy tales in the library. We noticed there were several versions of each book; some were translated and illustrated by different individuals.

Andersen was born in Denmark, and therefore his books were originally written in Danish. It is interesting to get two different translations and compare them. Sometimes the titles are slightly different also. For example, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* and *The Brave Tin Soldier*. Some translators choose to simplify the tales for younger children. After studying a few different versions of Andersen’s tales, I had the children retell the tales in their own words.

Some of the tales we read were: *The Nightingale*, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, *The Snow Queen*, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, *The Swineherd*, and *The Ugly Duckling*. I had the children read these aloud. Sometimes they made illustrations to accompany the tales. The children also enjoyed writing their own fairy tales.

Andersen’s tales provide excellent material for discussion. As you read the biography of Andersen and some of his well-known tales, you will begin to see why he wrote the tales. *The Ugly Duckling* is said to be an autobiographical account of Andersen’s life. As a child, Andersen was unattractive and strange. He lived in a dream world of his own. He was teased and tormented by other children. Through his determination though, he became a famous writer and in later life dined with kings and queens.

Andersen often told his tales in the palaces of kings and queens; therefore, he used them frequently as subjects for his stories. One good example of this is the tale, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. Perhaps Andersen was trying to convey to the people in the king’s court that they should learn to think for themselves. As you read his other tales, you will find interesting ideas to discuss with your children.

After studying these two authors, my children began writing their stories for their book projects. Since we had studied quite a bit about Stevenson, I thought they might like to write about pirates. My two older

girls composed their stories on their own while my younger boys dictated their stories to me. This took about one week. My oldest daughter Michelle wrote a pirate story, but I could tell she was not really happy with it. I told her to write about anything she wanted. She chose to write a storybook for her baby sister, Mandy, entitled *Mandy's Day at the Zoo*. Michelle has a strong interest in art; therefore, she focused primarily on her illustrations. After she had written her story I read it and helped her edit it. I had her rewrite the story in present tense. She had written in past tense as if Mandy was telling the story. After she wrote it in present tense, with Mandy still telling the story, Michelle said she realized that it sounded much better this way. Then Michelle typed her story on our word processor.

Melissa wrote a story about a little boy who was searching for buried treasure in his backyard. She was very descriptive in her account of his expeditions. She typed her story on the word processor, and I helped her with the punctuation, which is her most difficult area. Melissa concentrated a lot on her illustrations, looking through some books to find pictures to aid her. She did not trace the pictures, but she used them as examples for some of her drawings. Since she types and spells better than I do, she helped me type my boys' stories.

I was very encouraged to see the progress that Robert and Raymond had made in the year's time since they wrote and illustrated their first books. Their choice of vocabulary and their story content showed great advancements. I was also amazed at how they were able to carry an underlying theme throughout their stories. This is something we had discussed briefly as we read other books. Each day I was more and more amazed as they dictated their stories to me. Even I was anxious to find out how their stories would end! It was also exciting to see the evidence of their personalities in their stories.

Raymond thought he was going to write a three hundred page novel! After writing eighteen pages on notebook paper that Raymond had dictated to me, I informed him that he had better wrap up the story. He said he would end it, but that he was going to write a sequel! Very quickly he came up with a terrific ending that surprised me.

Robert's story was almost as long. Since my hand was worn out, he dictated much of his story to his sister Melissa. I was amazed at how Robert managed to keep three different parts of the story going at once. He used phrases such as, "Meanwhile back at the palace..." and "Out in the middle of the ocean ...". He had so many ships and subplots that it was fascinating to see how he kept track of them all and managed to neatly wind up the entire story. Robert also took great care with his illustrations. He said that his story could have been real, so he wanted his pictures to look real. In his book the year before, he was not as concerned with his art

work.

From these few examples, you can see numerous skills that each child has been able to develop. I did not specifically teach my children spelling, vocabulary, composition, how to develop a plot, and so on. But, through reading many, many well written books and discussing them, they were able to absorb much information and have a good time doing it. Each child is already talking about the books they will write next year. They have also informed me that they want to pick their own topics next time. You see, I am learning too! Writing books with my children is the most rewarding project we have done. It is also a project that can be shared with family and friends and treasured for a lifetime.

Often you can take a classic, such as *Heidi* or *The Swiss Family Robinson*, and make a complete unit study out of it. Literature-based units are fun and fairly easy to create. It is not necessary for you to completely read the book beforehand. Just glancing through it will give you some ideas of related topics to pursue in the course of your study.

When you begin to plan the unit, there are some pertinent questions you should ask yourself. Where does this story take place? Is this story a true account, based on a true account, or fictional? What character qualities do the individuals in the story possess? (Often you will discover the answer to this question as you read the book with your children.) Is there a biography about the author in print? If not, you can use a reference book at the library such as *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children* or *The Junior Book of Authors* which will include a few pages about the author. You may photocopy these few pages since the reference books are not available for circulation. Usually an encyclopedia will offer some information about the author, too. Are there any key historical persons mentioned in the book? What about inventions and discoveries pertinent to the time and locale of the story? What other books did the author write? Do they in any way relate to the book you are studying? In what country and time period did the author live?

As you read along, many opportunities will arise which will stimulate areas of interest to investigate. Since you can not be dashing off to the library every other day, an encyclopedia will prove helpful in these instances. For example, if you are reading and you come across a person or place you had not noted earlier, you can look up brief information concerning these topics in the encyclopedia. Most of us do not have time to read the book in its entirety and make elaborate lesson plans ahead of time. It is often these unplanned, spur-of-the-moment interruptions that provide us with the best educational opportunities. I believe it is important to purchase reference materials as opposed to multitudes of textbooks and workbooks. You will get many miles out of reference materials. A new or even old set of encyclopedias may not be feasible for each family to acquire. An affordable handy reference book which we use frequently is entitled *A First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Our Children Need to Know*, by B.D. Hirsch, Jr. Families with older students may prefer *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, also by Hirsch. The Internet has also opened up a quick and easy means for us to reference information quickly.

Getting back to our literature-based studies, you will sometimes come across something interesting as you read, such as an invention of the day, unusual animals, various land formations, plants, peoples, battles, bodies of water, political terms, geographical terms, and the list continues. The next time you are in the library you can select books describing some of the more appealing topics. You can keep a list of topics to explore fur-

ther as you read along. This is also a beneficial activity for the children. As you are reading them a classic, have them compile a list of other topics to investigate. Then have the children research those particular topics at the library or in an encyclopedia or in another reference book you may own. In this way the children are learning to be observant, and they are participating in the research of the unit study.

Literature-based units are also beneficial in that they provide us with excellent writing models. Many textbooks and workbooks today are written in short, choppy, uninteresting sentences. Classics and other outstanding literary works offer us a feast of literary delicacies. Scenes are vividly described. Characters come alive as the author unveils their personalities. We are able to experience the political, geographical, and economical climate of the story. We can learn many things while being entertained by the author.

This exposure to good literature broadens our vocabulary and our understanding of the world in which we live. Many writing activities naturally flow from this encounter with inspiring literature. Dictate favorite passages to your children noting spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, and capitalization. Occasionally you might have them rewrite the passage, replacing adjectives with words they choose. Another time they could change the tense or voice of a passage you are studying. Younger children can copy the selections. They might circle words they do not know. They could circle the phonics patterns in the words they do know and tell you how the rules are applied. Other times they could circle all the words with capital letters and explain why these words are capitalized. For more ideas on copying and dictation, I urge you to read ***You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*** by Ruth Beechick. After reading this book you will be able to incorporate many of Ruth's ideas into your own unit studies. This has been one of the most beneficial books pertaining to homeschooling that I have read.

The next several pages contain sample literature-based units. Hopefully these will give you some ideas so that you can branch out and conduct a literature-based unit that appeals to your family. Generally, I read the classic aloud to my children. The older children also take turns reading aloud. This gives them good practice with their oral reading skills. If your library has several copies of the classic you have chosen, you may want each child to have his or her own copy. Often children like to follow along as they listen. This of course depends on their learning style. Other children, especially younger children do better if they draw while Mom is reading. They can illustrate something from the story.

For information about a literature-based unit study guide I created for my children based on Russell Hoban's "Frances" books, see page 330. This guide is chock full of cut-and-paste activities, puzzles and games.

Johanna Spyri, the author of the well-loved classic *Heidi*, lived from 1827-1901. For information about the author use a reference book from the library like *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*. Often the volume of *Heidi* that you choose will have biographical information at the end of the book. This is the case in the volume that I have chosen of *Heidi* published by Grosset and Dunlap, Inc., the Illustrated Junior Library edition. Read the biographical information before you begin to read the story. As you read the story, see if your children can detect the similarities between Heidi's childhood and the author's childhood. Explain that the author chose to write about things with which she was acquainted. This is helpful to keep in mind as your children compose their own stories. Books originally written in other languages come to us by way of a translation. The volume of *Heidi* that I chose was translated by Helen B. Dole.

Check your library for other books written by Johanna Spyri. My library has a book entitled, *The Children's Christmas Carol*, adapted by Darlene Geis. The Swiss Alps are the setting for this enchanting tale as well. This book is a good choice for capable children to read to themselves or to read to their younger siblings. It helps to reinforce the visual image of the Swiss Alps portrayed in *Heidi*, as well as to further acquaint them with the character of Johanna Spyri.

### Setting

The story takes place predominantly in the mountains of Switzerland. Parts of the story take place in Frankfurt, Germany. Obtain library books with information about Switzerland and Germany. Look for books with good pictures so the children can get a glimpse of the vast mountains and beautiful valleys described in *Heidi*. Use maps and a globe to locate Switzerland and Germany. Find out pertinent information about these two countries such as their major exports, religion, education, and government.

As you read with your children, stop at the end of each page or chapter and have them make a list of the words they recall from the story that describe the setting. Have them look for words that describe the scenery, topography, and geographical character of the passages read. What words are used to describe the living quarters? At first you might do this assignment at the end of each page to help your children develop their abilities for locating these descriptive attributes. Later, you can reserve this activity for the end of each chapter. This activity may be oral or written; done on an individual basis or as a group. Are there certain words the author uses frequently? Are her words colorful? As you progress with this word-finding assignment, your children can describe the feelings that are evoked by the author's choice of vocabulary.

### Characters

Discuss the characters brought to life in each chapter. Have your children write a list of the phrases used to describe each character. From these descriptions have the children make an illustration of each character. It is not necessary to do this assignment for every chapter. Choose some interesting passages from each chapter to dictate to your children. Discuss punctuation, capitalization, grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. Have the children look up words they cannot define. I find it helpful to have the children look up the unfamiliar words in a simple thesaurus. Have them read the passages inserting their own words for various adjectives. Can they describe the person as accurately or as interestingly as the author can? Does the author use any words that have a different meaning today? If so what are those words?

### Bible

Biblical themes are evident throughout the book. In chapter fourteen Heidi relates to the Grandfather the principles of Scripture she learned from the Grandmamma in Frankfurt. She then reads the story of the Prodigal Son to the Grandfather from her beautiful book given to her by the Grandmamma. Realizing that he has been a wayward son, the Grandfather repents and asks the Lord for forgiveness. Read the story of the Prodigal Son with your children and compare the story of the Grandfather's life with the Biblical story.

Heidi also learned that when we pray, we must pray for the Lord's will to be done in our lives. Often He does not answer our prayers immediately because the timing is not right. He frequently has lessons for us to learn beforehand, and often He has a plan different and better than ours. Heidi's faith is strengthened as these principles become evident in her own life. She learns to trust the Lord in all things and to share her faith with others.

Make a list of the character qualities of the main characters of the story. Using a topical Bible, such as *Nave's Topical Bible*, look up these attributes and read Bible verses pertaining to each character quality. Have your children try to identify which verses go with which individuals. The traits portrayed by the persons in the story may be positive as well as negative.

### Narration

Whether oral or written, narration is a great memory building tool. It also enables us to determine if our children are not only understanding and retaining the story, but if they are improving their vocabulary. If done orally, we can evaluate their progress in verbal presentation. From time to time, we should tape our children giving an oral narration. This will allow them, as well as us, to hear the progress that has taken place. It is easier to

compare written narrations, and this should also be done to see if their writing skills have improved.

I find that dinnertime provides an excellent opportunity for the children to give oral narrations. They have an audience, including Dad who often cannot be part of the regular studies. This oral narration helps keep Dad apprised of the children's studies.

#### General Information

As mentioned on the preceding pages, the children can make a list of topics that arise as you read. The classic *Heidi* offers many avenues for further research. Switzerland, Germany, mountains, goats, flowers, trees, hymns, physical handicaps, and cheese are just a few. As you read, you will encounter more topics than you could possibly study, so choose to investigate only those of real interest.

To add a little variety to your study of *Heidi* you can check out a book about the famous legendary Swiss hero, William Tell. Several story-book versions exist depicting this gallant individual. In 1829, Gioacchino Rossini's opera, *William Tell* was performed. Today the *William Tell Overture* is very well known and loved. You may also be able to check out an audio cassette tape or record containing this famous overture.

It is evident from the story that Heidi loved old people, others less fortunate than herself, animals, and nature. Search for evidences of these qualities as you read. These can also be noted in the life of the author as you read her biographical information.

## The Swiss Family Robinson Unit

This beloved classic was written by Johann Wyss. The version we own was published by Grosset and Dunlap Publishers, an Illustrated Junior Library edition. William H.G. Kingston edited this version. This edition was illustrated by Lynd Ward, who also wrote and illustrated the well known book, *The Biggest Bear*.

I found another edition of *The Swiss Family Robinson* at the library. It was complete and unabridged like the one we own, and was also translated by W.H.G. Kingston, but it was published by Children's Press, Chicago. The final section of this edition contains biographical information about the author. Originally the story was written by Pastor John David Wyss who was an expert in farming and nature. He was born in Bern, Switzerland, in 1743. He created this story for his four children and although he recorded it, he filed the papers away. Years after the pastor's death, his son Johann Rudolph Wyss, who was a professor of philosophy at Bern and chief librarian, discovered the manuscript among his father's papers. He made some changes, touched up the story here and there, and took it to a Zurich publisher. It was an immediate success.

The after word in this version goes on to explain about the translation of the book into French and English. This information is beneficial for understanding how books are translated from one language to another and how we end up with so many different versions of the same story.

Another pleasing feature about this version of *The Swiss Family Robinson* is the informative material located in the margins. Difficult words from the text are defined, often accompanied by diagrams, and many of the animals and vegetation mentioned are depicted.

As an interesting activity, you may read a portion from one version of *The Swiss Family Robinson*, and compare it with the same portion from another version. Which translator portrayed a more vivid picture? What other comparisons can you make? Find an abridged version and compare it with an unabridged version. Do they evoke the same feelings? Why or why not?

As in the classic *Heidi*, the predominant characters in *The Swiss Family Robinson* are from Switzerland. The authors of both classics are Swiss. Locate a few library books about Switzerland to enhance your study. Choose books with quality pictures enabling your children to get a glimpse of the incredible geography of Switzerland. You will want to compare the geographical characteristics of Switzerland with the island that the family comes to inhabit.

This book provides an excellent basis for studying character qualities, animals, plants, land formations, geography, and the list multiplies as you read the book. An in depth study of the character qualities of perseverance, determination, patience, ingenuity, faith in the Creator, strong love of family, and hope can be made. Even the first page of this classic

gives us a glimpse of the faith of the father, who is also the narrator of the story. We find the family on board ship in the midst of a raging storm.

*My heart sank as I looked round upon my family in the midst of these horrors. Our four young sons were overpowered by terror. "Dear children," said I, "if the Lord will, He can save us even from this fearful peril; if not, let us calmly yield our lives into His hand, and think of the joy and blessedness of finding ourselves forever and ever united in that happy home above."*

This strong faith in the supreme Creator is carried throughout the book. Chapter one, Shipwrecked and Alone, offers an opportunity to view similar situations documented in Scripture. We read in Acts chapter 27 of Paul sailing for Italy and being caught in a violent wind. A similar event is described in the first chapter of *The Swiss Family Robinson*. Even the wording is similar. After reading the entire first chapter of the book, read Acts chapter 27 and have your children compare the two accounts. Of course one is a true account and one is not. (One area of contrast is that in the classic, only the Robinson family is spared, and in the biblical passage, all those on board are spared.) Another biblical passage that comes to mind when I read this first chapter of the classic is Jonah chapter one. This can be compared with the account in *The Swiss Family Robinson*. There is also the biblical account of our Messiah in the storm tossed boats with His disciples in Mark 4:35-41.

As you read chapter one, many areas of interest will surface. For example they contrived swimming belts for the mother and the boys who could not swim. This provides a good opportunity for discussing the principle of buoyancy. You can experiment by putting various items in a pan of water and finding which ones float and which ones sink. Once again I recommend David Macaulay's, *The Way Things Work*. Many topics such as levers, pulleys, buoyancy, floatation, and friction arise in our story and are simply and concisely addressed in Macaulay's book.

*We immediately searched about for what would answer the purpose, and fortunately got hold of a number of empty flasks and tin canisters, which we connected two and two together so as to form floats sufficiently buoyant to support a person in the water, and my wife and young sons each willingly put one on.*

In the second chapter, A Desolate Island, we begin to see the development of the character of the coast. The children may begin keeping a list of the descriptions of the land and water. You will encounter terms such as bay and inlet which may require defining. A great number of birds appear in this chapter along with animals on the wrecked ship. The children may make a separate list with the names of these creatures.

As the family was making their way toward the island in their homemade vessel, the dogs were swimming along beside them and growing extremely weary. They occasionally rested their forepaws on the outriggers of the little craft and Jack wished to prevent them from this. The father intervened quoting from the Scriptures, "Stop, that would be unkind as well as foolish; remember, the merciful man regardeth the life of his beast." I looked up merciful in my topical Bible to locate the text for this passage. In *Nave's Topical Bible* it reads as follows. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Proverbs 12:10. (I chose to carry the passage a little further.) You may wish to look up this passage in different versions and compare them. It is interesting because later these dogs serve as not only companions for the family, but as protectors.

Another incident which can be compared with a similar occurrence in Scripture appears in chapter two of the classic.

*As soon as we could gather our children around us on dry land, we knelt to offer thanks and praise for our merciful escape, and with full hearts we commended ourselves to God's good keeping for the time to come.*

In Genesis 8:20 we find that as soon as Noah was on dry land, he built an altar to the Lord and offered a sacrifice. A comparison can be made also between the animals on Noah's ark and the animals on *The Swiss Family Robinson's* ship. Can your children find any other similarities in the two accounts?

The personalities of the characters in the book become more evident as the story unfolds. Have the children locate a few phrases in each chapter that give evidence of each person's character.

In chapter two we get our first clue as to the whereabouts of the stranded family. Your children may keep a list of clues describing the location of the island. What kind of information would be useful to collect to make this determination? The scientific explanation below provides a good opportunity to integrate some physical principles of light.

*The children remarked the suddenness of nightfall, for indeed there had been little or no twilight. This convinced me that we must not be far from the equator, for twilight results from the refraction of the sun's rays. The more obliquely these rays fall, the farther does the partial light extend; while the more perpendicular they strike the earth, the longer do they continue their undiminished force, until, when the sun sinks, they totally disappear, thus producing sudden darkness.*

Have the children copy this passage and make a list of the words they do not understand. Look these words up in a dictionary to help clar-

ify the meaning of the passage. Try creating this phenomenon with a globe or ball and a light. Perhaps the children could then make a diagram to illustrate this experiment.

Chapter three, *We Explore Our Island*, offers a beautiful illustration made with words. After reading this chapter with your children, re-read some of the more descriptive parts and have them make illustrations to accompany them. They might then copy a few pertinent sentences at the bottom of their pictures. You will encounter some interesting plant life in this chapter. Keep a list of the plants the Robinson family comes across and the uses they find for them.

Chapter four enables us to study another scientific principle. Fritz watches as his father sucks juice from a sugar cane. He too tries this and finds he cannot extract any juice. A simple library book that leads you through an investigation of the power of air is called, *Simple Science Experiments with Straws*, by Eiji Orii and Masako Orii.

*“How do you get the juice out, Father?”*

*“Think a little,” I replied. “You are quite as capable as I am of finding out the way, even if you do not know the real reason of your failure.”*

*“Oh, of course,” said he, “it is like trying to suck marrow from a marrow bone, without making a hole at the other end.”*

*“Quite right,” I said. “You form a vacuum in your mouth and the end of your tube, and expect the air to force down the liquid from the other end which it cannot possibly enter.”*

As you read on, you will find that the coconut milk which Fritz had in his flask had fermented from the heat of the sun. He tugged the cork from his flask and there was a loud pop as the milk came foaming out like champagne. Fritz said it tasted like excellent wine. Read about fermentation from an encyclopedia or library book. Try putting some apple juice or other sweet juice in a jar and setting it in the sun for several hours. What happens? Why?

More animals appear in this chapter. Add them to your list. Have the children relate the account of how Fritz adopts a baby monkey. Have one of your children look up monkeys in an encyclopedia or library book, and share some interesting bit of information with the family. Each child can research an animal and relay the findings with the family. Your family may choose to investigate animal classifications and categorize the animals you meet as you read. You can use an encyclopedia or the *Usborne Book of Animal Facts*, by Anita Ganeri. Anita Ganeri and Judy Tatchell wrote another book which you may find helpful called *How to Draw Animals*, published by Usborne. Most library books about animals contain a great deal of evolutionary material. Often the evolutionary con-

tent can be overlooked. *Mammals and How They Live*, by Robert M. McClung, is a library book that contains information regarding the way animals are classified.

The *Character Sketches* books, published by Institute in Basic Life Principles, contain interesting information about numerous animals. There are three volumes in the series. Using the indexes found in each volume, you will be able to locate pertinent information about the animals you encounter in your study. These beautifully illustrated books integrate Scripture with the study of nature. They are a delightful addition to any nature study.

In chapter five, We Revisit the Wreck, the children awake to find that Fritz has placed a dead, stiff jackal in a life-like stance before the tent. The other children are quick to try and guess what sort of animal this is. One guesses a yellow dog, another wolf, and still another striped fox. The father ends the quarrel by telling them that a jackal partakes of the nature of all three. Using a library book or encyclopedia look up each of these animals, and compare them.

The father and the older boys maneuvered their vessel made of large kegs back to the wrecked ship. Once they arrived they decided to accommodate their craft with equipment suitable for sailing. Here you will find several nautical terms. Look these up under boats or ships in an encyclopedia or book from the library. Some of the terms you will encounter are: mast, sail, spar, lug sail, masthead, rudder, oar, and ballast.

Discuss the plan the father contrived for using flags for signals. Although their system was a simple one, you might want to investigate the signal flags that have been used by ships.

Many domestic animals are mentioned in this chapter. They also have an encounter with a shark. Have one of the children read about sharks and share some interesting information with the family. What category would “sharks” be classified under?

Now that I have gone through five chapters and given you suggested activities and writing assignments for each, investigate some chapters on your own.

I would like to make a few suggestions for writing assignments that you can integrate as you choose. You may select a sentence or paragraph from each chapter that you feel emphasizes the most valuable character qualities. Have your children copy these selections or take them from dictation. Using a topical Bible you can investigate what the Bible has to say about the various character traits.

Choose a paragraph that is very descriptive. Have your children look up those descriptive words in a thesaurus, and re-write the paragraph substituting the new words. Discuss the feeling evoked by this change. Is

the message as clear? (Often a thesaurus can be checked out of the library.)

Many difficult words appear in the text. Their meanings, however, can generally be discerned through context. Choose a couple of sentences with complicated words. Have the children verbally replace these words with words from their own vocabulary as they are able to discern the unfamiliar words from context. Later try this as a written exercise and have the children copy the sentences, omitting the unfamiliar words and leaving a blank in their place. Then have them fill in their own words.

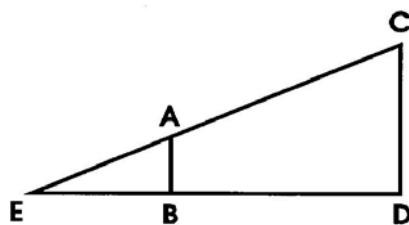
Do not try to define every difficult word as you read to your children. This causes reading to be choppy and uninteresting. A few exercises involving unfamiliar words from time to time will be far more beneficial.

I am just going to touch on some of the remaining chapters of the book. Chapter seven, *We Build a Bridge*, exemplifies some engineering principles as they seek a way to complete their task. In chapter eight, *The Journey to the Wonderful Trees*, we find that these magnificent trees are fig-bearing mangroves of the Antilles. Locate a book on trees for an accurate description and illustration. What were some of the peculiarities of the trees mentioned in the chapter? What new animal appears and how does it prove useful to the family?

In the next chapter, *The Tree-House*, we find the father using geometry to aid in the task of constructing a ladder of proper height to reach a desired branch.

*“Geometry will simplify the operation considerably; with its help the altitude of the highest mountains are ascertained. We may, therefore, easily find the height of the branch.”*

The following passage offers an explanation for determining unknown heights by similar triangles. The triangle EBA is similar to the triangle EDC because angle E is the same in both triangles and the angle ABE and angle CDE, by construction are both right angles. Therefore this equality results:



Thales, a  
Ancient Greece,  
Egyptians when

mathematician of  
surprised the  
he was able to tell

them the height of their Great Pyramid. By comparing the shadow of his staff to the height of the staff and the shadow of the pyramid to the height of the pyramid, he was able to find the height very quickly. He was using this same principle of similar triangles.

The father also constructs a bow and arrow. Most boys are interested in bows and arrows. You may wish to find a library book about archery. This is a sport that my boys really enjoy. Read Psalms 127:3-5.

A Visit to Tenthholm, chapter 10, begins with the father quoting from Scripture:

*“Six days shalt thou labor and do all that thou hast to do, but on the seventh, thou shalt do no manner of work. This is the seventh day,” I replied, “on it, therefore, let us rest.”*  
*“The leafy shade of this great tree is far more beautiful than any church,” I said; “there will we worship our Creator.”*

These passages and the dialogue that goes along with them offer good material for discussion. Read the Genesis account of creation noting what the Lord has said about the seventh day. It is interesting that the father realized that they did not need a church to worship the Creator. What is the church?

As you read, you will find that the family gave names to their various abodes and bodies of water on the island. Can the children recall all the names? Maybe your children will want to re-name some of the landmarks, bodies of water, buildings, and parks in your area. Perhaps they can think of names that would be significant to them. (If you have read the Anne of Green Gables series, you will find that Anne always made up names for various places in her town. She felt the original names lacked imagination.)

There are 44 chapters in all. Therefore, I could not possibly discuss them all in this book. You will encounter many forms of plant and animal life which you can investigate and classify. You will read about many ingenious devices which the family contrives to make their life more agreeable. You will experience their family unity and dependence on the Creator.

One last activity I would like to mention is to encourage your children to keep a simple log or journal. Buying or making a special book to record life's daily happenings will prove helpful. Chapter nineteen supplies us with an encouragement in this endeavor.

*In the evening, when our room was illuminated with wax candles, I wrote a journal of all the events, which had occurred since our arrival in this foreign land. And, while the mother was busy with her needle and Ernest was making sketches of birds, beasts and flowers with which he had*

*met during the past months, Fritz and Jack taught little Franz to read.*